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THE APPLICATION OF BERNARD LONERGAN'S THEORY OF CONVERSION
TO THE THREE MAIN CHARACTERS IN SUSAN HOWATCH'S NOVELS
OF THE STARBRIDGE SERIES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and
Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

The Reverend Teresa Gioia Hunt

December 2009

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The Reverend Teresa Gioia Hunt

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OF THE STARBRIDGE SERIES

By

The Reverend Teresa Gioia Hunt

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ABSTRACT

THE APPLICATION OF BERNARD LONERGAN'S THEORY OF CONVERSION TO THE THREE MAIN CHARACTERS OF SUSAN HOWATCH'S NOVELS OF THE STARBRIDGE SERIES

By

The Reverend Teresa Gioia Hunt

December 2009

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Maureen R. O'Brien

The purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate that Bernard Lonergan's theory of conversion can be applied to the fictional lives of the three main characters in Susan Howatch's novels of the Starbridge series. This will validate Lonergan's theory and provide a comprehensible demonstration of it as well. The rationale of this study is based on two well-established assumptions. The first, articulated by Erich Auerbach in modern literary theory, is that literature mirrors reality; the second, expressed by Paul Ricoeur, among others, is that an author expresses his/her own worldview. Howatch's three main characters, Charles Ashworth, Jonathan Darrow, and Neville Aysgarth, reflect reality because as clergymen in the Church of England, they sin repeatedly, just as every Christian does. Afterward, through a process of redemption, they confront their sin, repent, and then work to put things right. Writing of those who experience conversion,

Bernard Lonergan says that “they have to learn with humility that religious development is dialectical, that the task of repentance and conversion is life-long.” This is precisely the process of conversion that these fictitious characters demonstrate. Susan Howatch herself has written on the ways in which the “religion” of an author necessarily seeps into his/her works. In addition, Howatch admits to having been in the throes of a conversion experience as she wrote the Starbridge novels. On many levels, then, these novels represent reality. Thus they provide a suitable vehicle for applying, exploring, and understanding Bernard Lonergan’s complicated theory of conversion.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother Tina Gioia who introduced me to the novels of Susan Howatch and to my father Joseph Daniel Gioia whose spirituality nurtured my own.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Maureen O'Brien, Associate Professor of Theology and Director of Pastoral Ministry, Duquesne University, Dr. Charles A Huttar, Professor Emeritus of English, Hope College, and Dr. George Worgul, Professor of Theology and Department Chair, Duquesne University, for their unfailing encouragement, support, wisdom, and counsel in the writing of this dissertation. I would also like to thank my children Gianna and Jno Hunt, and my dear friend Lori Stebler for their help, patience, and love as I wrote this dissertation. Most of all I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to Susan Howatch whose labor of love in writing the novels of the Starbridge series inspired me, and whose keen interest in the subject of this dissertation and cherished friendship urged me on to complete my task.

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Introduction

The Background, Rationale, Purpose, and Method of this Dissertation and an Outline of the Chapters

1.1 The Background

The background of this study emerges from the conscious desire to present theology as an endeavor worthy of and accessible to every Christian. To this end, the writings of Bernard Lonergan, especially his Method in Theology, provide a logical place to begin our discussion, for it was Lonergan who located the foundation of theological method in the intellectual, moral, and religious conversion of the person who would engage in theology.¹ Lonergan arrived at this conclusion within the contemporary context of his work, a context influenced by the rise of historical consciousness, the prevalence of cultural pluralism, and the sensitivity to subjectivity.² Within this complex *milieu*, Lonergan defined theology as an interlocking set of specialties ordered by their function to achieve theology's one goal, the knowledge of God. Although Lonergan's process of conversion that underlies his Method in Theology

¹Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology (Toronto: University of Toronto Press for the Lonergan Research Institute, 1994) 237-243. Lonergan describes intellectual, moral, and religious conversion as leading to a new understanding of oneself and of reality.

² Warren Harrington, "Conversion as Foundation of Theology: An Interpretation of Bernard Lonergan's Position," diss., Fordham U, 1980, 3.

has been examined and interpreted in depth by several scholars and theologians,³ the philosophical and technical language in which he couches his theory may prohibit the average Christian from understanding its concepts and experiencing its effects.

In order to more easily comprehend and experience the process of conversion that forms the basis of Lonergan's theological method, whose aim is to know God, one needs to discover a way to make it more accessible to the average Christian. Robert Detweiler and David Jasper identify conversion as one of the major themes of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition that appear in imaginative literature.⁴ Indeed, according to these two advocates of the study of religion and literature, myths, stories, and poetry have been used as vehicles for speculation on the human person and the universe from time immemorial.⁵

Having this knowledge in mind and being acquainted with the six novels of Susan Howatch's Starbridge series, one can recognize in the three main characters, Jonathan Darrow, Neville Aysgarth, and Charles Ashworth, examples of churchmen who undergo the experience that Lonergan calls conversion as they seek to serve Christ and as they interact with one another. Although Susan Howatch herself was not familiar with Bernard Lonergan's work, nevertheless, these novels replicate the context in which he developed the theory that theology's foundation is based in the intellectual, moral, and religious conversion of the theologian. Not only does Howatch write with a

³ Terry J. Tekippe, Bernard Lonergan's Insight: A Comprehensive Commentary (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Inc., 2003) maintains that Lonergan laid the foundation philosophically in Insight for what he accomplished twenty years later in Method in Theology; and Walter Conn, Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender (New York: Paulist Press, 1986) interprets Lonergan's method in terms of Thomas Merton's life.

⁴ Robert Detweiler and David Jasper, ed., "The Great Themes of Literature and Religion," Religion and Literature: A Reader (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000) 127. The three other major themes are identified as death, love and evil, and the visions of the end times.

⁵ Robert Detweiler and David Jasper, ed., "The Introduction," Religion and Literature: A Reader xi.

consciousness of the history in which her characters live, she also portrays both the Anglican Church and English society of the time exhibiting the pluralism in which conversion according to Lonergan can take place. In addition, the three main characters in these novels who experience conversion illustrate the self-conscious turning-to-the-subject that is so necessary within Lonergan's method. Within the three main characters in Susan Howatch's six novels of the Starbridge series, then, the reader can gain a clear illustration of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion that Lonergan claims prepare one to engage in theology and thus arrive at the knowledge of God.

1.2 The Rationale

This study's rationale is based on two well-established literary assumptions. The first of these was articulated masterfully by Erich Auerbach in his classic Mimesis.⁶ According to Auerbach, there is no doubt that all literature from antiquity to the modern era represents or recreates reality in some way. In analyzing a work of literature, however, specific questions may arise concerning just how stylistically a literary work does mirror reality. For instance, early on in Mimesis, Auerbach contrasts the description of Odysseus' return in Book 19 of the Odyssey with the call of Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac that appears in Chapter 22 of the book of Genesis. Both of these accounts from antiquity possess epic qualities, but, according to Auerbach, Homer's description is "externalized, uniformly illuminated, at a definite time and in a definite place."⁷ In addition, despite all the details given by the author, the character of Odysseus who returns

⁶ Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).

⁷ Ibid. 11.

from his long journey is basically the same person he was when he departed. On the other hand, because the Biblical story expresses outright only what is absolutely necessary, leaving time and place undefined and thoughts and feelings unexpressed, the story of the sacrifice of Isaac bids us to interpret and understand Abraham's actions. Furthermore, in the presence of a single and yet hidden God, Abraham's character develops within the universal history that the entire Biblical narrative depicts as God's dealings with his people.⁸ Both of these literary works from antiquity represent reality, but their style and purpose is radically different. Homer seeks to "make us forget our own reality for a few hours" while the Elohist writer of the sacrifice of Isaac wants us to "fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history."⁹ Within Mimesis, Auerbach examines literary works from many periods, demonstrating how each one reflects reality on its own terms and according to the prevailing rhetorical rules of the time in which it is written.

The second literary assumption on which this dissertation is founded has to do with the fact that an author expresses his/her particular worldview. Paul Ricoeur discusses this phenomenon in an interview conducted at his home in a suburb of Paris in October, 2001, on the occasion of his receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Conference on Christianity and Literature. When asked whether we can separate our religious beliefs from our philosophical beliefs, Ricoeur, responding as a Christian believer, says unequivocally, "Certainly not."¹⁰ In a similar fashion, an author who

⁸ Ibid. 16-18.

⁹ Ibid. 15.

¹⁰ Alan D. Savage, "Un Entretien avec Paul Ricoeur," trans. Ellyn Lockerbie, Christianity and Literature 22 June 2002, Online, High Beam Research 9 Sept. 2007, paragraph 14.

professes to be a Christian demonstrates his/her religious beliefs in some way on the literary page.

Susan Howatch herself has written on the ways in which the “religion” of an author necessarily seeps into his/her works.¹¹ Howatch claims that she wrote the Starbridge novels as the result of her own religious conversion; however, she did not start out intending to write a Christian novel. Instead, she wanted to portray clergymen as “multidimensional human beings.”¹² To accomplish this, the author had to engage in a great deal of research. Howatch admits that an atheist could have learned all that she did, but that an atheist would not have injected these novels with the great Christian themes of sin, repentance, forgiveness, redemption, resurrection and renewal that the author herself encountered as she delved deeper and deeper into the study of Christianity. Howatch did not intentionally plant these themes in these novels. They simply emerged in her characters and their situations as a result of her own personal conversion and spiritual development.

Besides expressing unconsciously the religious beliefs of the author, these novels also represent the actual historical context that comprises their setting as well as the theological perspectives of several Anglican theologians of the time. The novels cover the period between 1937 to 1968, with a few flash-forwards to 1988. During these years, cataclysmic events such as World War II, post-war reconstruction, astounding advances in industry and technology, and a sexual revolution took place. The Church of England attempted to be a bastion of truth throughout this era of monumental change. Yet it, too,

¹¹ Susan Howatch, “Do Christian Novels Exist?” Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch, ed. Bruce Johnson and Charles A. Huttar (Selingrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2005) 259.

¹² Ibid. 259.

was deeply affected by this socio-political *milieu*. Fostered by the various trends within society and culture, the Anglican Church nurtured leaders who propounded widely diverse perspectives on God, the Church itself, and its mission. Howatch's three main characters who experience conversion according to Bernard Lonergan's Method in Theology embody the viewpoints of several major churchmen and theologians of the period. The author even uses excerpts from several of these theologians' writings to introduce the themes of each chapter and to help propel the plot forward. By reflecting her own conversion experience on the pages of these novels, by representing the socio-political context of the time, and by illustrating the various theological stances within the Church of England through her main characters who undergo conversion according to Bernard Lonergan's theory, these novels of Susan Howatch's Starbridge series represent reality on several different levels.

1.3 The Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate that Bernard Lonergan's theory of conversion can be applied to the fictional lives of the three main characters in Susan Howatch's novels of the Starbridge series. Since literature represents reality, an analysis of Lonergan's process of conversion as it appears on the literary page will demonstrate the theory, validate it, and show its applicability to the lives of actual Christians who engage in the theological endeavor.

1.4 The Method of this Dissertation

The method of this dissertation will comprise three steps. These will demonstrate the applicability of Bernard Lonergan's process of conversion as a foundation for his theological method to the three main characters in Susan Howatch's six novels of the Starbridge series. First, this dissertation will provide an overview of the six novels of Susan Howatch's Starbridge series. This will include the background of the novels in light of Howatch's own conversion experience as well as her views on literature's purpose as a vehicle for theological themes. In order to understand the conversion that takes place within each of the three main characters in these novels, the actual theological perspectives they represent and their historical counterparts will be discussed and analyzed with particular reference to the social and cultural factors that gave rise to them. Secondly, the process of conversion that Bernard Lonergan proposes as a necessary starting point for his theological method will be examined in light of each of the three theological stances portrayed in the three main characters of the Starbridge novels. A detailed analysis of each of these character's intellectual, moral, and religious conversion experiences will then be made by referring specifically to the events of their lives as they are depicted in the novels. Lastly, this dissertation will assess the applicability of Bernard Lonergan's process of conversion to the three main characters in Susan Howatch's Starbridge series as well as discuss the validity of Lonergan's thought that conversion is a necessary prerequisite for engaging in theology. Since literature represents or recreates reality, the assessment of Lonergan's process of conversion with regard to these three literary figures can then be applied to the life of every Christian who seeks to engage in the study of theology in order to gain a knowledge of God.

1.5 An Outline of the Chapters

Chapter One: Overview of Susan Howatch's novels in the Starbridge Series

The first chapter will present the background for Susan Howatch's six novels as well as a discussion of how she uses the craft of fiction for theological purposes.

The genesis of the idea for the series as well as Howatch's treatment of the theological themes of sin, repentance, forgiveness, redemption, resurrection, and renewal will be demonstrated. Lastly, the historical milieu of each of the novels, the Anglican Church's position within each historical context, and the issues facing the Church of England that impinge on each main character will also be discussed.

Chapter Two: The History/Theology of Three Movements within Anglicanism

Howatch draws from the experiences and writings of several major Anglican theologians of the period as bases for her three main characters. These theologians' ideas represent three major theological perspectives within Anglicanism. A historical overview of the Church of England and of each theological stance and its influence within Anglicanism will be presented. For instance, William Ralph Inge's writings on Christian mysticism and Neo-Platonism are reflected in the words of Jon Darrow, the mystic. The influence of classical mysticism within Anglicanism will be assessed. In Neville Aysgarth, the modern liberal, we see both the evolutionary theological ideas of Charles E. Raven and the new morality of John A. T. Robinson. The effect of these two positions on the Church of England will be demonstrated. From the conservative orthodox tradition,

Howatch selects Austin Farrer to inform Charles Ashworth's thought. Farrer's ideas on humanity, the Christ, and the Church especially will be discussed.¹³

Chapter Three: Anglicanism Encounters Bernard Lonergan

This chapter will provide an explication of Bernard Lonergan's theory of conversion as it is described in his Method in Theology. Then, its relevance to the three theological positions within Anglicanism discussed in Chapter Two--classical mysticism; modern Protestant liberalism; and conservative orthodoxy that values Catholicism--will be explored. Since conversion for Lonergan always takes place within a particular community, the similarities and differences between the conversion experiences of the Roman Catholic Thomas Merton and the conservative orthodox Anglican Austin Farrer will be discussed.

Chapter Four: Conversion in the Starbridge Novels of Susan Howatch

This chapter will examine the conversion experiences of the three main characters in the Starbridge Series: Jon Darrow, Neville Aysgarth and Charles Ashworth. Since these literary figures represent different theological and liturgical perspectives, their conversion experiences will necessarily be distinct from one another. Furthermore, although their real life experiences overlap, the different events in each character's life as well as their perceptions of themselves and their circumstances have created unique venues where their individual transformation occurs. The similarities among these

¹³Susan Howatch herself chose to include some of these theologians' works in her Library of Anglican Spirituality, London: Mowbray, 1994.

characters' conversion experiences can be viewed and explained according to Bernard Lonergan's definitions of religious, moral, and intellectual shifts in consciousness. Therefore, a detailed discussion of each main character's intellectual, moral, and religious conversion as defined by Lonergan and a comparison of them will be presented.

Chapter Five: Critique of Howatch in Light of Bernard Lonergan

Susan Howatch uses the theology of William Herbert Vanstone as a basis for her thought on the creative process. How do Vanstone's ideas shine within the light of Bernard Lonergan's theory of conversion? For Lonergan theological viewpoints opposed to those a person holds actually help in achieving greater knowledge of reality and of the self as well. To what extent do the differing views of the three main characters in these novels on the Christ, for instance, aid or abet their individual growth in self-consciousness and in self-transcendence? Jon Darrow, Neville Aysgarth, and Charles Ashworth all "sin" many times on their road to conversion. How does this fact relate to conversion as described by Bernard Lonergan and how does each character's sin affect his particular conversion? Lonergan also believes that the Christian community, the Church, where conversion may occur, must itself be in a process of self-constitution within the wider human community. Does the Church of England depicted by Susan Howatch in the Starbridge series reflect Lonergan's vision for the Church as an appropriate venue where conversion may take place? Finally, what implications do the answers to these questions have for modern Christians? These topics will be explored in the final chapter of this dissertation.

Chapter One: Overview of Susan Howatch's Novels in the Starbridge Series

- A. The Genesis and Background of the Novels in the Starbridge Series
 - 1. "The Second Journey"
 - 2. Dorothy L. Sayers
 - 3. Herbert Henry Asquith
 - 4. Herbert Hensley Henson
- B. Howatch's Fiction: A Venue for Theology
 - The Theology of William H. Vanstone
- C. Howatch's Treatment of Major Theological Themes in the Novels:
 - Sin, Repentance, Forgiveness, Redemption, Resurrection, Renewal--
 - The Theology of Father Christopher Bryant
- D. The Historical Milieu of Each Novel in the Starbridge Series
- E. Theological Issues Facing the Church of England in each Novel

Chapter Two: Historical/Theological Perspective of Three Movements in Anglicanism

- A. Historical Background of the Church of England
- B. Classical Mysticism
 - 1. History
 - 2. Influence within Anglicanism
 - 3. Meaning in the Novels: The Life and Thought of William Ralph Inge
- C. Modern Protestant Liberalism
 - 4. History
 - 5. Influence within Anglicanism
 - 6. Meaning in the Novels:
 - a. The Life and Thought of Charles E. Raven
 - b. The Life and Thought of John A. T. Robinson
- D. Conservative Orthodoxy with Catholic Leanings
 - 7. History
 - 8. Influence Within Anglicanism
 - 9. Meaning in the Novels: The Life and Thought of Austin Farrer

Chapter Three: Anglicanism Encounters Bernard Lonergan

- A. Bernard Lonergan's Theory of Conversion in Method in Theology
- B. Relevance of Lonergan's Theory within a Mystical Perspective
- C. Relevance of Lonergan's Theory within a Modern Liberal Protestant Context
- D. Relevance of Lonergan's Theory within a Conservative Orthodox Context
- E. Affinities and Differences between Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism in Applying Lonergan's Theory of Conversion: Thomas Merton and Austin Farrer

Chapter Four: Lonergan's Intellectual, and Moral, and Religious Conversion in
Susan Howatch's Novels of the Starbridge Series

- A. Analysis of the Three-Fold Conversion Experience of Jon Darrow
- B. Analysis of the Three-Fold Conversion Experience of Neville Aysgarth
- C. Analysis of the Three-Fold Conversion Experience of Charles Ashworth
- D. Similarities among the Three Characters' Conversion Experiences:
Lonergan's Religious, Intellectual and Moral Conversion
- E. Differences among the Three Characters' Conversion Experiences:
Each Character's Perception of Self and Reality

Chapter Five: Critique of Howatch in Light of Bernard Lonergan

- A. W. H. Vanstone's theology in light of Bernard Lonergan
- B. The Effect of Different Theological Perspectives on Conversion
 - 1. Christology Emerging from each Character's Theological Stance
 - 2. Effect of each Christological View on Conversion
- C. The Effects of Sin in the Process of Conversion:
Positive and Negative Effects for Each Character
- D. The Church of England as Venue for Conversion
 - 1. Lonergan's Vision for the Church
 - 2. Howatch's Depiction of the Church of England
 - 3. Consonance and Dissonance between the Two
- E. A Question for Further Exploration: Implications of this Study for
Modern Christians

Chapter 1

Overview of Susan Howatch's Novels in the Starbridge Series

1.1. Introduction

This chapter will first present the genesis of the Starbridge novels in terms of the author's own life experience. The influence of her reading of "The Second Journey" and the affinities of Howatch's creative process with that contained in the theology of Dorothy L. Sayers will be explored. In addition, the historical background for several characters in the Starbridge series will be shown. Then an examination of Howatch's fiction as a venue for theology will be discussed in light of the theology of William H. Vanstone that is at the heart of all of the novels. Howatch also treats the major theological themes of sin, repentance, forgiveness, redemption, resurrection, and renewal in the novels, and this will be shown to be associated with the theology of Father Christopher Bryant. Lastly, this chapter will demonstrate the historical milieu of each novel and the theological issues faced by the Church of England in each venue.

1.2. The Genesis and Background of the Novels in the Starbridge Series

Prior to her writing the Starbridge series of novels, Susan Howatch had gained considerable fame and fortune, especially in America,¹ first in the genre of the gothic romance, and then within that of historical fiction. In her early works, largely gothic romances, she adhered to the conventions of that genre. Later Howatch turned to historical fiction where she began developing and reworking this genre to suit her own purposes. For instance, instead of endowing a romantic and exciting time in the past with realistic features, Howatch took a historical situation in the past and reworked it within a modern setting.² She also related her family sagas from the perspective of different characters from successive generations.³ These techniques were later employed and further developed in the Starbridge novels.⁴

However, the notoriety and wealth that Howatch achieved with her initial literary successes left her dissatisfied. In fact, Howatch writes: “In 1980 I returned to England after living for sixteen years abroad, but I found it hard to settle...I felt a complete failure as a person despite my worldly success.”⁵ Perhaps events in her personal life precipitated these feelings. In 1964, Howatch emigrated to America where she not only launched her successful career as a writer, but also married and gave birth to a daughter. Then, in

¹ Susan Howatch, Personal Interview, 26 August, 2006. During this interview, the author stated that on the whole American readers had helped her acquire fame and fortune, more so than their British counterparts.

² For example, the family saga *Penmarric*, published in 1971, details the fortunes and disputes of the Penmar family in Cornwall during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The chapter headings make clear that the Penmar affairs parallel those of the Plantagenet family, including Henry II (1154-1189) and Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122-1204).

³ In *Penmarric*, five separate narrators tell the story and move it along chronologically. Mark Castallack opens the novel in 1890; his wife Janna covers the period from 1890-1904; then Mark's illegitimate son Adrian relates events from 1904-1914; and finally his legitimate sons Philip (1914-1930) and Jan-Ives (1930-1945) complete the tale.

⁴ Bruce Johnson, “One Story, One Voice, One Love,” *Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch*, ed. Bruce Johnson and Charles A. Huttar (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2005) 22.

⁵ Susan Howatch, “Cathedrals, Fact and Fiction: The Starbridge Novels” (Ely: Ely Cathedral Publications, 2001) 4.

1975, marital difficulties caused Howatch to separate from her husband and to return to England for a while before relocating in Ireland from 1976-1980. However, by 1980, after settling her daughter in boarding school, the novelist herself went to live in Salisbury, England. There, motivated by her disenchantment with worldly pursuits, she recalls that she would look out her window each day and see the walls of the great cathedral rising before her. It was then that Howatch began to ponder the deep questions about God, religion, and ultimate concerns. She writes:

It occurred to me then that although I had devoted my adult life to serving myself I had wound up miserable. Obviously I was on the wrong path, and needed in the future to serve not myself but something else, possibly God.⁶

Not coming from a religious background, Howatch realized that her first task was to go to the library and find out more about God.⁷ She immersed herself in books about Christian theology and spirituality. By 1985, Howatch's research led her to write the first novel in the Starbridge series, Glittering Images, whose main character is Charles Ashworth. However, after completing this narrative, she put the manuscript away because she was unsure if God wanted her to publish it or not. Howatch speaks of this as being "a deeply confusing time" in her life when "the familiar landmarks" were no longer there, and "deep feelings of alienation" haunted her.⁸ The turning point in her spiritual quest came when she read an entry in the Dictionary of Christian Spirituality entitled "The Second Journey." There she discovered six characteristics that described exactly what she was experiencing. These included the following: 1. Something occurs in a person's life to break up his/her settled existence. 2. An outer journey often creates the

⁶ Ibid. 5.

⁷ Susan Howatch, Personal Interview, 26 August, 2006.

⁸ Susan Howatch, "Cathedrals, Fact and Fiction: The Starbridge Novels" 5-6.

context for this inner journey. 3. Loneliness marks second journeys. 4. Such journeys involve a profound crisis in feelings. 5. A person searches for new meanings, fresh values, and different goals. 6. The end of the second journey brings a self-knowledge and strength that helps people integrate their existence and reach out productively to enrich the world.⁹ Finally, after reading this article, Howatch began to understand what she had been experiencing. Slowly, clarity was restored in her life once again. She realized that she was indeed supposed to continue writing novels, but not any longer for her own fame and fortune as before. Instead, she felt she was being called to write new books as well as she could, and then to let God use them in any way God chose.¹⁰

At this point Howatch withdrew the novel Glittering Images from the drawer where she had placed it, and she started writing the second novel of the Starbridge series, Glamorous Powers. Unlike most of her characters that develop as she writes, Howatch comments that the character of Jon Darrow, the main character in this novel, was clear and well-defined from the very beginning.¹¹ Midway through this second novel, the author introduced her third main character of the series, Neville Aysgarth, the young archdeacon who gives Darrow such a hard time. With the entry of Neville Aysgarth into the novels, Susan Howatch realized that she had three main characters for her series, Charles Ashworth, Jon Darrow, and Neville Aysgarth. It was then that she writes: “I had one of those great creative flashes which only happen rarely; I saw the whole series of six books altogether, at once, chiming, interweaving and dovetailing with one another.”¹²

⁹ Gerald O’Collins, S.J., “The Second Journey,” Dictionary of Christian Spirituality, ed. Gordon S. Wakefield (London: S. C. M. Press, Ltd., 1983) 235-236. This experience parallels what Bernard Lonergan calls conversion.

¹⁰ Susan Howatch, “Cathedrals, Fact and Fiction: The Starbridge Novels” 6.

¹¹ Susan Howatch, Personal Interview, 26 August, 2006.

¹² Susan Howatch, “Cathedrals, Fact and Fiction: The Starbridge Novels” 6.

This vision led to an “explosion of creativity” that lasted until Susan Howatch had completed the final draft of Absolute Truths, the last novel in the series.

It is no accident that Susan Howatch chose to include among the books published in her Library of Anglican Spirituality¹³ a work that reflects her own creative process. In The Mind of the Maker, first published in 1941, Dorothy L. Sayers¹⁴ not only illumines the doctrine of the Trinity, but she also presents a comprehensible means of understanding by way of analogy everything that is created or made through human effort. Howatch’s creation of the Starbridge series proves to be a case in point. In the “Preface” to this edition, Howatch reflects on Sayers’ analysis of the creative process that humans undergo, whether they are artists, writers, scientists or entrepreneurs. Drawing on her own experience as an author, Sayers envisions the creative process as comprising three stages: (1) the creative vision, (2) the realization of that vision, and (3) the impact of that vision on the author and others.¹⁵ This process, in turn, reflects the creative activity of God and also represents an interpretation of the highly symbolic Trinitarian language of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Sayers couches her explication of the Trinity as well as her interpretation of the creative process in three concepts: the Idea, the Energy, and the Power. She speaks in terms of the experience of a writer who first possesses an Idea of what he/she wants to write. This Idea must be expressed through the

¹³ The Library of Anglican Spirituality is a series of eight works written by prominent twentieth-century Anglican theologians that were edited with introductions by Susan Howatch and commissioned by the publisher after she completed the Starbridge Series. See the Bibliography for the specific titles and authors included in the series.

¹⁴ Dorothy L. Sayers was a novelist, dramatist, and translator of Dante. During World War II, she published The Mind of the Maker and was subsequently offered a Lambeth doctorate in divinity by Archbishop William Temple. She is recognized as one of the most distinguished Anglican theologians of the twentieth century.

¹⁵ Susan Howatch, introduction, The Mind of the Maker, by Dorothy L. Sayers, Library of Anglican Spirituality (London; Mowbray, 1994) ix.

Energy that the writer expends in time and space in giving the Idea its form in words.

The Power that comes forth from the union of this Idea and its Energy produces the effect the writer's work has on him/herself and on others.¹⁶ Likewise, the Father, (analogous to the Idea) the first person of the Trinity, is expressed in time and space through the Son, Jesus Christ, (the Energy or Activity) who is the incarnation of the eternal. Through the Father (the Idea) and the Son (the Energy), the Spirit or the Power issues forth and affects both the inner life of God and all others involved in creation. Sayers quotes St. Hilary who characterized the Trinity in a similar way: "Eternity is in the Father, form in the Image, and use in the Gift."¹⁷ Sayers makes the analogy between the Trinity and the writer's creative process in this way:

These three are one, each equally in itself the whole work...If you were to ask a writer which is the 'real book' –his Idea of it, his Activity in writing it or its return to himself in Power, he would be at a loss to tell you, because these things are essentially inseparable.¹⁸

According to Sayers, one can apply this analogy to everything that human beings create.

In this way she demonstrates that the whole universe mirrors the Trinity, making this supposedly obscure doctrine comprehensible.

In considering the genesis of the Starbridge novels, Dorothy L. Sayers' representation of the Trinity provides a framework for understanding the creative process of Susan Howatch. Before writing the Starbridge series, the novelist gleaned seminal ideas for several of the characters and the major plots of these novels from history, specifically from the lives of the statesman Herbert Henry Asquith and the churchman Herbert Hensley Henson. When she began to experience a conversion to God, Howatch

¹⁶ Dorothy L. Sayers, The Mind of the Maker 29-31.

¹⁷ Ibid. 31.

¹⁸ Ibid. 31.

chose to adapt and develop the real life situations of these historical figures to the lives of clergymen whom she desired to portray in these novels. The energy Howatch acquired from her historical and theological research as well as her own conversion experience helped her weave the fictitious connections among her characters who themselves demonstrate a process of conversion to God during the course of the novels. In accordance with Dorothy L. Sayers' vision of the creative process, Susan Howatch possessed the idea for these novels that was then invested with the energy of her research, her thought, and her conversion to God. The power produced in the author as she engaged in this creative process furthered her own conversion to God and also produced the rich tapestry of life that takes place in and around Starbridge Cathedral. In this venue the author situates characters that depict for the reader the conversion experience as described by Bernard Lonergan.

Susan Howatch has revealed that the lives of two historical figures inspired her writing of the Starbridge series.¹⁹ The first of these was Herbert Henry Asquith (1852-1928), First Earl of Oxford and Asquith,²⁰ who became Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1908 to 1916. The son of a small businessman engaged in spinning and weaving wool, Asquith attended the City of London School where he distinguished himself as a classical scholar and a remarkable public speaker. Awarded a scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford, Asquith achieved first-rate honors in humane letters and was elected a fellow at Balliol. This fellowship secured a seven-year stipend for him; however, he

¹⁹ Susan Howatch, Personal Interview, 26 August 2006.

²⁰ When Asquith was raised to the peerage in 1925, he proposed to take the title "Earl of Oxford" for the city near which he lived and the university he had attended. Descendants of previous Earls of Oxford, whose titles were by then extinct, raised objections; so H. H. Asquith became known as "First Earl of Oxford and Asquith." In practice he was known as "Lord Oxford."

chose not to study the classics, but to pursue a career in law instead. Eventually, Asquith's real ambitions extended beyond the practice of law to the arena of politics. He entered the House of Commons in 1886, and because of his outstanding service, he was given a Cabinet office by the time he was forty years old. Asquith became a leader of the Liberal Party which had faltered under his predecessors. During his career as Prime Minister, his government sponsored significant social legislation, restricted the power of the House of Lords, and led Britain into World War I.²¹

However, it was not Asquith's prominent political career with which Susan Howatch became fascinated; it was his private life.²² In 1877, he married Helen Kelsall Melland, the daughter of a Manchester doctor, and together they brought four sons and one daughter into the world. Unfortunately, Helen died from typhoid fever in 1891, leaving Asquith to raise young Raymond, Herbert, Arthur, Violet and Cyril on his own. In 1894, Asquith then married Margaret Tennant, the daughter of a wealthy landed aristocrat. "Margot," as she came to be known, had gained a reputation within intellectual and social circles; she was brilliant, vivacious, witty, and somewhat frivolous. She was very different from Asquith's sedate first wife Helen, and even from Asquith himself. However, it was a fact that, although Asquith was very serious when it came to politics, he preferred to relax in the company of female friends, especially if they were charming and witty.

Much later in his life and while he was still married to Margot, Asquith fell in love with Venetia Stanley, a brilliant, politically sophisticated member of one of England's

²¹ "Herbert Henry Asquith," Encyclopedia of World Biography, 2004 online, High Beam Encyclopedia, 30 Apr. 2008.

²² Susan Howatch, Personal Interview, 26 August, 2006.

oldest aristocratic families. Venetia was also a daughter of one of his closest friends. He maintained this *liaison* for quite some time, although it is believed that their love was never consummated. Eventually the young Venetia married her devoted suitor, Edwin Montagu, a Jewish member of the Cabinets under Asquith and Lloyd George. To satisfy Montagu's wishes, Venetia converted to Judaism.²³ However, both her conversion and marriage proved to be a mistake for her lack of love for Montagu eventually led Venetia to turn to alcohol as a remedy for her unhappiness.

Susan Howatch said that she wanted to retell this story, but she wished to make the statesman Asquith into a clergyman instead. Readers of the Starbridge series recognize the details of Asquith's private life in the plot involving Neville "Stephen" Aysgarth. However, Howatch claims that it took her the first novel in the series, Glittering Images and part of the second, Glamorous Powers, before she could weave the story of Neville Aysgarth into the overall vision she had for the six novels.²⁴ Then his narrative, which mirrors the private life of H. H. Asquith, dominated the third and fourth novels in the series, Ultimate Prizes and Scandalous Risks.

Herbert Hensley Henson, Bishop of Durham from 1920 to 1939, also sparked Susan Howatch's imagination. His colorful life and career provided seeds for the plot of the first novel in the Starbridge series, Glittering Images. Henson was by nature a historian, but his inclination to speak his mind on controversial subjects kept him in the public eye and allowed him little time for scholarly pursuits. In addition, his freedom in expressing his opinions often cost him the loyalty of his peers. Henson also had a

²³ Naomi B. Levine, Politics, Religion and Love: The Story of H. H. Asquith, Venetia Stanley and Edwin Montagu (New York: New York University Press, 1991) 311.

²⁴ Susan Howatch, Personal Interview, 26 August, 2006.

tendency to change his mind on topics of public importance. For instance, he was brought up in an Evangelical family, yet early in his ecclesiastical career, he became a high churchman. Despite his loyalty to the Church of England, Henson was considered a theological liberal because he believed that “the Established Church did not impress seriously-minded men, who studied the New Testament, and desired to be such Christians as it described.”²⁵ So, Henson determined to make the parish church “the visible meeting place of Christ’s disciples.” In the political arena, from 1935 onwards, Henson protested the British Government’s acceptance of Mussolini’s invasion of Abyssinia²⁶ and by the end of the 1930’s, he was outspoken in his condemnation of the anti-Semitic policies of Nazi Germany as well.²⁷

Despite Henson’s prominence in the ecclesiastical and political controversies of his time, Susan Howatch maintains that the most interesting aspect of this outspoken clergyman’s life was not his public, but his private affairs.²⁸ In 1902, he wed Isabella Caroline Dennistoun, a person whom Henson praises as “rising to the height of her new vocation [as a clergyman’s wife] with unfailing courage and loyalty.”²⁹ Despite this obvious adulation, Howatch contends that “Ella,” as Henson refers to her throughout his autobiography, never possessed the attributes required of her station. Owen Chadwick, on the other hand, writes that “Ella helped Henson. She was a kindly manager, and loved

²⁵ Herbert Hensley Henson, Retrospect of an Unimportant Life, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1942) 38.

²⁶ Owen Chadwick, Hensley Henson: A Study in the Friction between Church and State (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) 246-247. The country known as “Ethiopia” was called “Abyssinia” in the writings of both Henson and Chadwick.

²⁷ Herbert Hensley Henson, Retrospect of an Unimportant Life, vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1942) 413.

²⁸ Susan Howatch, Personal Interview, 26 August, 2006.

²⁹ Herbert Hensley Henson, Retrospect of an Unimportant Life, vol. 1 66.

an open house, and almost every day they had guests at their table.”³⁰ Where Ella fell short, however, was in her inability to carry on an intelligent exchange of ideas; guests found it difficult to listen to her *nice weather* conversation. The other disappointment Henson experienced in his married life was that Ella gave birth to one stillborn child and subsequently suffered a miscarriage. Henson compensated for his lack of offspring by adopting at least seven boys unofficially and overseeing and paying for their education.³¹ For Ella, the void of childlessness was harder to fill. However, in 1916, a young woman named Ferne Booker was engaged as a companion and aide to Mrs. Henson. She remained a part of the household for over thirty years and was called in Ella’s will “my acting daughter.”³² Howatch tells how this supposed *ménage à trois* did less to harm Henson’s reputation than his controversial statements, since any relationship between Miss Booker and the clergyman was believed to have been platonic throughout its duration.³³

In the first novel of the Starbridge series, Glittering Images, the personal affairs of Herbert Hensley Henson are reworked to form those of Bishop Alex Jardine. The main character in the novel, Charles Ashworth, is commissioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury to go to Jardine’s residence in order to investigate whether there were any improprieties existing between him and his wife’s assistant, named Lyle Christie in the novel. Howatch cautions that the character of Lyle Christie bears no conscious resemblance to Ferne Booker.³⁴ Ashworth’s investigations of the relationship between

³⁰ Owen Chadwick, Hensley Henson: A Study in the Friction between Church and State 88.

³¹ Ibid. 87.

³² Ibid. 88.

³³ Susan Howatch, Personal Interview, 26 August, 2006. Chadwick substantiates this when he writes that Ella received an inheritance from both the Hensons as if she were their daughter. Chadwick, Hensley Henson: A Study in the Friction between Church and State 88.

³⁴ Susan Howatch, “Author’s Note,” Glittering Images (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1987) 435.

Alex Jardine and Lyle Christie eventually lead him through a mental breakdown which inadvertently brings him to a deeper awareness of himself.

It is obvious from these observations that Susan Howatch obtained the background for several of the characters and major plots in the novels of the Starbridge series from the annals of British political and Church history. In reflecting upon this fact, Howatch commented that her deep love for “all things English” as well as a certain nostalgia for England as it was before World War II did influence her in her desire to write the Starbridge series.³⁵ However, the author’s intentions went far beyond a mere recreation of history. Howatch’s creative process in producing the Starbridge novels was affected by issues and events experienced by a person undergoing a conversion to God.

1.3. Howatch’s Fiction: A Venue for Theology

By the time Susan Howatch was in the middle of writing the second Starbridge novel, Glamorous Powers, she writes that “an entire world, sacred and profane seemed to burst from my brain.”³⁶ This was no superficial recreation of reality. Her own religious journey and her research moved the writer to want to demonstrate that theology and Christianity were both rooted in everyday life. In fact, she realized that through the art of storytelling, the topics of ultimate reality with which theology deals could be made more accessible and more comprehensible to people in a postmodern world who, in her own words, are “seeking meaning amidst chaos and integrity amidst fragmentation.”³⁷ Of course, as a novelist, Howatch claims that she always began with people; she viewed her

³⁵ Susan Howatch, Personal Interview, 26 August, 2006.

³⁶ Susan Howatch, “Cathedrals, Fact and Fiction: The Starbridge Novels” 6.

³⁷ Susan Howatch, “The Starbridge Novels and Twentieth Century Anglican Theology,” Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch 232.

job as conveying “who the characters in my novels were, what they did to each other, what they did to themselves, why they did it and what it all meant.”³⁸ However, once Howatch began to study theology and to experience what she calls a “religious conversion”³⁹ herself, her characters and the stories she told about them underwent an enormous transformation. Immersed in the real world with real difficulties and real challenges, her three main characters in the Starbridge series, who are clergymen themselves, demonstrate what it means to live theologically, that is, with an awareness of God in every aspect of their lives.

For instance, Howatch writes that in Glittering Images she was “still feeling [her] way into the project.”⁴⁰ At first, Charles Ashworth, the main character in this novel, exudes confidence; he knows who and what he is. In fact, when the novel begins on the first day of July in 1937, he is a Cambridge professor of early Church History and a chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Gordon Lang. Ashworth also represents the conservative wing of the Church of England and, liturgically, the middle way between Catholicism and Protestantism. However, Charles lives displaying the “glittering image” of a successful young clergyman/professor without ever having examined the real core of his own being. When the Archbishop of Canterbury sends him to investigate Bishop Alex Jardine’s self-deception, Charles Ashworth begins to confront the demons that lie beneath the surface of his own personality. (As was previously mentioned, in the character of Bishop Jardine, there is reflected the life of Herbert

³⁸ Ibid. 232.

³⁹ Conversion to God has varied meanings. In Chapter 3 of this dissertation, Bernard Lonergan’s meanings of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion will be discussed and their application to the experiences of the three main characters in the Starbridge series will be shown in Chapter 4. Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 238-241.

⁴⁰ Susan Howatch, “The Starbridge Novels and Twentieth-Century Anglican Theology,” Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch 242. Also see the Appendix, page 282.

Hensley Henson, a former Bishop of Durham, whose ministry influenced political as well as ecclesiastical affairs.) During his inquiries, Charles is thrust into a spiritual crisis that compels him to face his past and to understand the truth about himself. Charles Ashworth's spiritual quest leads him to greater self-awareness and self-realization. Susan Howatch writes that "the theology of Glittering Images...is really concerned with the mystic's timeless assertion that one should know oneself in order to know and serve God."⁴¹ By the conclusion of the first novel, Charles Ashworth has been led on an exploration of his past which gives him a greater self-awareness that allows him to serve God in new ways.

Each of Howatch's main characters in the Starbridge novels undergoes a quest for self-realization,⁴² so it is no surprise that Charles Ashworth, the main character in the first novel, models this process. In Chapter III of this dissertation, it will be shown that Bernard Lonergan's process of conversion parallels this quest for self-realization. However, Howatch did not rely on Lonergan's theory of conversion, but on the writings of Father Christopher Bryant who studied the connections between Jungian psychology and Christianity.⁴³ For Howatch, the language of psychology does not explain away religious phenomena; rather it simply describes them using a different language and speaking from a different perspective.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ibid. 242.

⁴² Doris T. Myers, "Forgiven Sinners: Susan Howatch's Church Novels," Anglican Theological Review 80 (1998) 45-59. Myers contends that each main character undergoes a spiritual "crisis" that is similar to that of the author.

⁴³ For the relationship between Jungian psychology and Christianity see Gayle Hamilton Gill's "Alternate Language and Abused Powers: The Sexual, Psychic, and Spiritual in Howatch's Ecclesiastical Novels," Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch, ed. Bruce Johnson and Charles A. Huttar 122-140.

⁴⁴ Susan Howatch, "The Starbridge Novels and Twentieth-Century Anglican Theology," Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch, 243.

As the character of Charles Ashworth develops throughout the Starbridge series, he, nevertheless, always stands for the conservative traditionalist wing of the Church of England. Already in Glittering Images, we are introduced to another main character, Jonathan Darrow, a monk of the fictional Fordite order, who becomes the main character of the second novel, Glamorous Powers. Darrow reflects the thought of W. R. Inge, a famous dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, London from 1911 to 1934. Dean Inge was an expert on Christian mysticism; however, Howatch appreciated that he wrote as a nonmystic and a scholar who maintained his objectivity and practical approach to his subject just as the character of Jonathan Darrow does. Yet in Glamorous Powers, Darrow's mystical experience leads him on a spiritual quest, the outcome of which is a completely new life outside of the monastery. Throughout the Starbridge series, Jonathan Darrow stands for the mystical strand in the Church of England and he also represents its Anglo-Catholic wing.

In the course of Jonathan Darrow's assumption of a new life, he comes in contact with the archdeacon Neville Aysgarth, a clergyman whose personal life mirrors that of the former Prime Minister, H. H. Asquith. With regard to his theological stance, however, Aysgarth represents liberal Protestantism whose optimism permeated the British theological scene prior to the two World Wars. The theologian that surfaced as an influence in Aysgarth's life and thought in the third novel, Ultimate Prizes, was Charles Raven. He had written eloquently on God as immanent, creating, and loving, who is continuously at work in the process of evolution. Since the third novel takes place

between 1942 and 1946, Aysgarth must confront the evil precipitated by war throughout the world and recognize God as crucified, not simply as a benign creator.⁴⁵

Then, in the fourth novel, Scandalous Risks, Howatch fashions the liberal Neville Aysgarth as an advocate for the theology of Bishop John Robinson, the author of Honest to God, the theological bestseller published in 1963 that tried to restate Christianity for modern times. In this novel, the conservative Charles Ashworth is now the bishop of Starbridge and the liberal Neville Aysgarth is the dean of the cathedral there. The conflict that develops between these two churchmen over the interpretation of Robinson's book persists throughout the entire novel. Howatch does not side with either character's point of view; however she does show how Aysgarth's interpretation of Robinson's Honest to God helps him achieve warped and misguided ends.⁴⁶

In the fifth novel, Mystical Paths, Howatch returns to the Darrow family, but this time to the experience of Jonathan's son Nicholas. Nicholas possesses psychic powers like his father; however, unlike Jonathan, he is not disciplined and does not respect the boundaries between good and evil, between true spirituality and the paranormal. Howatch is aware of the dualistic problem she encounters when writing about the paranormal. Yet she sees evil or "the dark side" as part of the creative process. In the end, Howatch says, "nothing is wasted and everything is redeemed ... darkness is finally soaked up by the light and the work is finished."⁴⁷

It is in the sixth and final novel, Absolute Truths, that the conservative Charles Ashworth, the character with whom the series began, comes to learn this theological

⁴⁵ Ibid. 244.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 245.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 246

truth. Through an experience of immense personal grief, the sudden death of his beloved wife Lyle, Ashworth penetrates to the fundamental theological truth that informs each of the novels as well as Susan Howatch's creative process. Adapting St. Paul's monumental phrase, "All things work together for good to them that love God,"⁴⁸ Charles Ashworth attains a new understanding of himself in the wake of the death of his wife and his wayward experiences subsequent to this. Through this character's experience, the author enunciates her belief in the powerful doctrine of redemption. Although Howatch uses the writings of Austin Farrer to inform this last novel, it is really the theology expressed by W.H. Vanstone in his Love's Endeavor, Love's Expense that permeates the entire novel, according to Howatch,⁴⁹ and indeed, one might say, all of the novels in the Starbridge series. An illustration of Vanstone's theology here will help in making connections with Bernard Lonergan's theory of conversion that will be discussed in a later chapter.

In his well-known treatise on love, Vanstone speaks analogically about the love between human beings, the love of the creative artist, and the love of God, the supreme Creator. The subject of this book first arose from Vanstone's inability to comprehend how the creator God could care or "love" all of the insignificant parts of his creation. However, as he watched two schoolboys working on building a model of a tract of land, a project that Vanstone had suggested to them while they were on holiday, he began to discern the true meaning of love.⁵⁰ The boys began their creative endeavor halfheartedly, but before long, they plunged into building their model with the utmost devotion and

⁴⁸ Romans 8: 28. This is a formative quotation in the conversion experience of Charles Ashworth, although it does not comfort him after his wife Lyle's death. Susan Howatch, Absolute Truths (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1994) 150.

⁴⁹ Susan Howatch, "The Starbridge Novels and Twentieth-Century Anglican Theology," Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch 246.

⁵⁰ W. H. Vanstone, Love's Endeavor, Love's Expense (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1977) 31.

precision. Vanstone writes: “I watched and listened. I observed how the placing of each stone and twig was a matter for careful discussion.”⁵¹ In reflecting on what he saw the boys doing, Vanstone noticed three things. First, their activity involved both “working and waiting.” Second, the boys gave to their workmanship a certain power over themselves. Third, the disproportion between the boys and their creation was overcome by the gift of value, the value inherent in the created work.⁵² The most astonishing fact of all was that in making their model, the two boys had given of themselves so totally to the project that Vanstone could only call their self-sacrifice love.

Having set the stage for his discussion, Vanstone then presents his phenomenology of love. He identifies three marks that characterize inauthentic love: the mark of limitation, the mark of control, and the mark of detachment.⁵³ These marks result from the actions of the beloved toward the one who loves. By a mark of limitation, Vanstone signifies the barriers that the beloved erects preventing a person from loving totally and completely. These barriers may be the beloved’s testing of the love being bestowed or the beloved’s inability to receive love completely. Such barriers prevent the lover from loving the beloved with an unbounded love; love is thus limited and, according to Vanstone, inauthentic.⁵⁴ By a mark of control, Vanstone means that the beloved exists in total freedom and thus controls the outcome of the lover’s affection. The lover allows the beloved freely to receive or to reject the love that is offered while the one who loves accepts with grace either outcome.⁵⁵ Finally, the mark of detachment

⁵¹ Ibid. 31.

⁵² Ibid. 33.

⁵³ Ibid. 53.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 42-45

⁵⁵ Ibid. 45-47.

grants the beloved a certain power over the one who loves. This power is one that gives meaning and value to the beloved while the one who loves becomes vulnerable before the beloved.⁵⁶ All three marks of inauthentic love grant the beloved the ability to limit, to control, or to detach from the love that is offered, thus making that love inauthentic.

Having defined the three marks that characterize a false love, that is, the mark of limitation, the mark of control, and the mark of detachment, Vanstone proposes that authentic love may then be described as being limitless, precarious, and vulnerable. At the same time, in the experience of humankind, whether between persons or between a creative artist and his/her work, Vanstone believes that authentic love is never attained, only approximated, or existent as a hope or desire toward which men and women aspire.⁵⁷

This, however, is not true when we speak of the love of our creator God which in itself serves as a model for authentic love. According to Vanstone, in the work of God the Redeemer, we have in history a disclosure of what God is, of his actual being. He writes further:

Scripture speaks of the Redeemer as ‘emptying himself’: and Christology has ventured to interpret the coming of the Redeemer as a Divine ‘self-emptying’, or Kenosis ... The ‘emptiness’ of the Redeemer, in the poverty and humility of His historical existence, will point to the ‘emptiness’ of God in and through his eternal activity.⁵⁸

What Vanstone then explains is that kenosis is the very heart of God’s being and activity in relation to his creation and he thus defines kenosis as “that activity of authentic love which is the activity of God in creation.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid. 50-52.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 53-54.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 58.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 59.

For Vanstone, then, God's activity in creation is marked by the three characteristics he has already attributed to authentic love, that is, limitlessness, precariousness, and vulnerability. In his relationship with creation, God's love is limitless. God holds nothing back of God's self. In fact, devotional language that identifies God's glory or majesty with some immeasurable reserve remaining in God is misleading, for God withholds nothing in his continuous activity of creation. Even our representation of God's creative activity through merely his Word misrepresents creation as a seemingly effortless endeavor. Instead, Vanstone likens God's self-giving or self-emptying in the creative act as being similar to the energy and effort put forth by a famous surgeon who once operated without stopping for seven hours, and then had to be led from the operating room like a blind man because he was so totally spent.⁶⁰

God's activity in creation is also precarious because he endows his beloved creation with freedom that might lead to a tragic situation that would necessitate God's redeeming. Here Vanstone accounts for the evil in the world. It does not originate in God, but is a result of the freedom God gives to the process of creation. Furthermore, any evil outcome always implies redemption. God does not foreordain or pre-program his purposes for creation. Instead, God's activity exhibits all the precariousness and poignancy of love. As Vanstone explains:

If the creation is the work of love, its 'security' lies not in its conformity to some predetermined plan but in the unsparing love which will not abandon a single fragment of it, and man's assurance must be the assurance not that all that happens is determined by God's plan but that all that happens is encompassed by His love.⁶¹

Besides precariousness, God's authentic love for creation is characterized by

⁶⁰ Ibid. 62.

⁶¹ Ibid. 66.

vulnerability. Vanstone is very careful here in explaining what he means by God's vulnerability. Not desiring to descend into an anthropomorphism that would detract from what Christianity signifies by the word "God," nevertheless he maintains that in some way which we do not understand, God in God's self is susceptible in his activity of creation. Since God's love for creation is authentic, God does not deny the power of response to his creation. This response may result in triumph or tragedy for creation and in some sense "hurt" or "disappointment" in God that is beyond God's control.⁶²

At the same time, Vanstone is clear that God's vulnerability or creation's power of response does not diminish God's being in any way. Our belief in a Trinitarian God assures us that God does not create out of need, but out of fullness. God is not fulfilled in creation; rather, creation emerges from the fullness within God.⁶³ Thus Vanstone describes the creative activity of God:

If God is love, and if the universe is His creation, then for the being of the universe, God is totally expended in precarious endeavor, of which the issue, as triumph or as tragedy, has passed from His hands. For that issue, as triumphant or as tragic, God waits upon the response of His creation. He waits as the artist or as the lover waits, having given all.⁶⁴

Within this statement of the creative process of God lies the essence of how Susan Howatch envisions her own experience as author of the novels of the Starbridge series. She claims that her "artist's signature" is contained in the words of the sculptress Harriet March⁶⁵ when she describes the creative process to Charles Ashworth:

No creator can forget [his creation]!...once you're hooked you're inside the work...it's part of you...you're enslaved and that's why it's such bloody hell when things go adrift. But no matter how much the mess and distortion make you

⁶² Ibid. 67. Vanstone admits that we cannot understand what it means for God to be vulnerable, hurt, disappointed, or grieved, and yet we use such words to describe God who is love.

⁶³ Ibid. 69.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 74.

⁶⁵ Susan Howatch, "The Starbridge Novels and Twentieth-Century Anglican Theology," Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch 247.

want to despair, you can't abandon the work...it's absolutely woven into your soul and you know you can never rest until you've brought truth out of all the distortion and beauty out of all the mess... that's the creative process which so few people understand.⁶⁶

One can see the affinity between this statement and the thoughts expressed by W. H. Vanstone on the phenomenology of love and God's creative process.

There exists, too, a parallel here between the creative process and the process of conversion that each of Howatch's main characters undergoes in the course of the novels. Just as God or the artist gives him/herself over to the other being loved or created, so, too, must each main character empty himself in order to proceed along that journey that leads him closer to God. When we discuss each character's process of conversion in terms of Bernard Lonergan's theory, we will note the affinities there as well with what W. H. Vanstone calls the phenomenology of love. At this point in our discussion, it is sufficient to have illustrated that the six novels of the Starbridge series serve as venues where theological themes are presented.

1.4. Howatch's Treatment of Major Theological Themes in the Novels

In the article "Do Christian Novels Exist?"⁶⁷ Susan Howatch reflects on how "novelists mine their conscious and unconscious minds for inspiration."⁶⁸ She also writes that a novelist's own worldview necessarily seeps on to the pages of a narrative and that she wrote the Starbridge novels as the result of her own religious conversion. "My prime interest lay in presenting clergymen as multidimensional human beings,"⁶⁹ however,

⁶⁶ Susan Howatch, *Absolute Truths* 377. See Chapter Five, page 229 for Harriet's complete quotation.

⁶⁷ Susan Howatch, "Do Christian Novels Exist?" *Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch* 256-264.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 258.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 259.

these novels have what the author calls her “fingerprints” all over them since they are infused with the great Christian themes of sin, repentance, forgiveness, redemption, resurrection, and renewal. As a matter of fact, these major themes that form the outline of Salvation History on the pages of Holy Scripture emerge spontaneously within the lives of Howatch’s three main characters and the situations in which they find themselves.

In a later chapter of this dissertation, the appearance of these themes within the scheme of Bernard Lonergan’s process of conversion will be discussed. At this point, however, it is necessary to examine the thought of Father Christopher Bryant, not only because it parallels Lonergan’s process of conversion, but also because it directly influenced Howatch’s treatment of these themes.⁷⁰ In one way or another, the experiences of each main character reflect a progression from sin, through repentance and forgiveness to redemption, resurrection, and renewal on the journey toward self-awareness that is described by Father Christopher Bryant in The Heart in Pilgrimage.⁷¹

Bryant’s theme of his book is “the growth in a relationship of love and trust towards God which leads to an outgoing love to our fellows and a living out of our own humanity.”⁷² Not only does this express the purpose of Bernard Lonergan’s theory of conversion, but it also describes the process of conversion each of Howatch’s main characters undergoes. Employing the metaphor of the journey or pilgrimage toward a “land of spices,” Father Bryant envisions each person as being created good and instilled with the image of God. During the course of life, every human being is involved on a

⁷⁰ Susan Howatch, letter to the author, 10 March 2008.

⁷¹ Christopher Bryant, The Heart in Pilgrimage: Christian Guidelines for the Human Journey, Library of Anglican Spirituality (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1994).

⁷² Ibid. 149.

quest for the fulfillment of his/her deepest desires. The story of the fall of humankind expresses the timeless truth substantiated by our experience, that, although God has made us good and in God's image, we fail to live up to God's purposes for us, and therefore we find ourselves gripped by evil within ourselves and within society around us. The source of this evil involves the doctrine of original sin which Bryant describes as a defect that makes us insufficiently human.⁷³ However, this is not the end of the "story"; rather, it reaches its *dénouement* in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in whom humanity attained perfection, and in the work of God everywhere to bring good out of evil.⁷⁴

Committing ourselves to the purposes of God for humankind puts us in touch with the deepest part of ourselves where the transcendent God dwells. Bryant equates this part of our personhood with what Carl Jung called the "Self," the shaping force within personality. Bryant writes:

It is as though the potential man is trying to become actual by inducing a person to make the choices and decisions and to perform the actions without which this actualization cannot take place. This pressure of the total Self seeking actualization...Jung sees...as the root of the experience of God.⁷⁵

As a person responds to this shaping force within the Self, he/she becomes conscious of it as the Spirit of God. In fact, it is the Spirit of God dwelling within each of us that sets us on our pilgrimage toward wholeness and peace. According to Bryant, no one is without the indwelling presence of God, although some people are either ignorant of it or ignore

⁷³ Ibid. 33.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 3-4.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 21.

it. At the same time, in everyone there are obstacles and counter-forces that inhibit us from heeding the urging of the Spirit or that, once on our journey, inhibit our progress.⁷⁶

In The Heart in Pilgrimage Bryant shapes the journey toward God and one's human fulfillment in terms of the mystical stages of purgation, illumination, and union. Each step corresponds to growth in self-awareness as well as progress in the process of conversion.⁷⁷ In the first stage of purgation, the organizing principle in each of us, the Self, in Jungian terms, or the indwelling presence of God's Spirit, in Christian terms, urges us to become aware of those elements in our personality that inhibit our progress toward peace and harmony. Jung calls this the "shadow" side of the personality, while Bryant discusses it in the traditional terms of the seven deadly sins.⁷⁸ Once a person becomes aware of the individual sins that inhibit progress in turning toward God, then he/she is ready to enter the second stage, the illumination of the journey with the light of a deepened faith. In this stage the seeker recognizes that the organizing principle working in each of us is also the Power behind the order of the universe.⁷⁹ As one reflects more and more on the love of God in the world and as revealed in Jesus Christ, a desire for union with God is nurtured. According to Bryant, it is prayer then that brings one into contact with the Almighty in this life, whether it be prayer of thanksgiving, of praise, of self-surrender, or merely contemplation. In addition, a yearning for self-discipline arises out of a continued growth in self-awareness, especially concerning one's shadow side. This leads to deeper repentance and a compulsion to do battle with those

⁷⁶ Ibid. 23.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 27. Bryant uses the New Testament word *metanoia*, meaning a change of heart or mind, interchangeably with conversion. He indicates that conversion may be "sudden" but more often is a "gradual process."

⁷⁸ Ibid. 36-42. The seven deadly sins are traditionally: pride, envy, anger, lust, gluttony, covetousness, and sloth.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 49-53.

elements in the personality that would inhibit one's union with God and God's purposes.⁸⁰

The stages of purgation, illumination, and union with God that Bryant enumerates as steps along the journey toward self-realization may be viewed in terms of the great themes of Christianity illustrated in the experiences of Susan Howatch's main characters. The stage of purgation equips the characters to recognize their individual *sins* and to *repent* of them. Then, within the illuminating phase, they experience both the giving and receiving of *forgiveness*, and *redemption* is achieved. Finally, as they move into the last stage, union with God, they experience reconciliation that leads them to begin a new life with renewed commitment to the journey (*resurrection* and *renewal*). A brief consideration of how each main character in the Starbridge series demonstrates this process is warranted at this point in our discussion.

In Glittering Images, the situation in which Charles Ashworth finds himself with regard to Alex Jardine and Lyle Christie compels him to face the real person that he is. Not until his mask of pride and envy fueled by anger is removed, not until his false self enflamed by gluttony, lust, and covetousness is purged does Charles come to understand the truth about himself.⁸¹ Through the help of his spiritual director (an aid on the journey, by the way, that Christopher Bryant highly recommends), Jonathan Darrow, Charles is led to discover the truth about his parents and his own birth and childhood, as well as acknowledge his own actions prior to his first wife's death. Once he becomes

⁸⁰ Ibid. 74-81.

⁸¹ Susan Howatch, Glittering Images 3-4. From the very beginning of the novel Charles Ashworth exudes tremendous pride in his being chosen by the Archbishop for a special commission; his sins of gluttony in terms of alcohol and cigarettes are also readily apparent. His envy, lust and covetousness become evident as his relationships with Bishop Jardine and Lyle Christie progress.

enlightened about his past, especially his parents' relationship, and once he also acknowledges his own guilt in the circumstances surrounding his first wife's death, Charles can then confront Bishop Jardine, the one on whom he has projected his own personal demons. Then, too, he can grasp the truth about Jardine's relationship with Lyle, and move on to redeeming that situation and embracing a new life with Lyle himself. Charles' entire journey through purgation, illumination, and union, or through sin, repentance, forgiveness, redemption, resurrection, and renewal in the novel Glittering Images, takes place within the context of Spiritual Direction as well as reliance on prayer and the sacraments, aids for the journey that Bryant suggests are necessary for each person to have. By the end of Glittering Images, Charles Ashworth has embarked on his journey, confronted some of his own personal obstacles, and recommitted himself to a new life with Lyle that will bring him closer to God, to serving others, and to his own self-realization. The reader witnesses his journey from different points of view throughout the novels, until in the last, Absolute Truths, Charles Ashworth has gained a deeper awareness of himself, of others, and of the God he serves. We shall eventually discuss how this movement toward self-realization also constitutes the process of conversion in Bernard Lonergan's terms.

In the second novel of the Starbridge series, Glamorous Powers, the character of Jonathan Darrow, who has acted as Charles Ashworth's spiritual director in the first novel, undertakes the same growth toward self-realization from sin through repentance and forgiveness, to redemption, resurrection, and renewal. Darrow's journey begins when his strong spiritual director and abbot of the order, Cuthbert Darcy, dies. Just before his death, Father Darcy has appointed Francis Ingram, Darrow's rival in the

fictitious Fordite order of monks, to succeed him. In the throes of his grief over the death of Father Darcy, Jonathan Darrow has a vision which he interprets to mean that he must leave the Fordite order. Before he is granted permission to re-enter the world, however, Darrow is compelled to submit to the counsel of his rival, Ingram, now the Abbot-General of the community. During their encounters, Jonathan Darrow is made to face the truth about his past and his relationships with his deceased wife and his two grown children. He begins his journey by sifting through the effects of his immense pride, especially in his glamorous powers, his envy, his lust, and his anger, all of which caused him to mistreat those closest to him. He admits that his unmitigated guilt made him superstitiously bargain with God; by entering the monastery he wanted to redeem the damage he had caused to others, especially to his deceased wife.⁸² Besides experiencing the forgiveness granted him by Francis Ingram in the sacrament of penance, Darrow must also forgive himself. As the novel continues, the truth of Darrow's vision becomes apparent, and he experiences redemption, resurrection, and renewal when he embarks on a new life outside of the monastery in his marital relationship with Anne Barton-Woods. That growth toward God and self-realization is a process and that it remains an unfinished journey until death can be seen in the continuation of Jonathan Darrow's troubles, especially when much later in the novel he resorts to relying on his own glamorous powers uncontrolled by careful spiritual direction. As with Charles Ashworth, the reader sees Darrow's journey from different points of view throughout the series until

⁸² Susan Howatch, *Glamorous Powers* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1988) 105-116. Finally, Jonathan Darrow admits the truth to Francis Ingram. His pride and lust had caused him to hurt his wife; his envy with regard to Ingram is obvious, and his anger and guilt toward his children is unfettered.

it reaches a climax in the fifth novel, Mystical Paths, as his son Nicholas learns to cope with the effects his father's sins have had on him.

A character who plays an important role in Glamorous Powers, and indeed, throughout the remainder of the entire series, is the young archdeacon Neville "Stephen" Aysgarth. Howatch relates his story primarily in the third (Ultimate Prizes) and fourth (Scandalous Risks) novels of the series. As already noted, Aysgarth's experiences are based in part on the historical romantic triangle comprised of H. H. Asquith, Prime Minister of England, Edwin Samuel Montagu, his friend and confidant and a Jewish member of the Cabinets under Asquith and Lloyd George, and Venetia Stanley, a sophisticated member of one of England's oldest aristocratic families.⁸³ However, Howatch fashions Aysgarth as a clergyman who himself embarks on his own personal journey that leads him from sin, through repentance and forgiveness, to redemption, resurrection, and renewal. As in the life of the other two main characters of the series, this pattern repeats itself in the experience of Neville Aysgarth as we witness his journey to self-awareness from different points of view throughout the third and fourth novels. Already as Ultimate Prizes begins, Howatch portrays Aysgarth as the proud archdeacon who likes to overindulge in wine, women, and the good things that high society can offer him. When his beloved wife Grace dies at a young age leaving him with five children to tend, he chooses to act on his prior lustful attraction to a young American socialite named Dido Tallent and pursue her until she accepts his proposal of marriage. Aysgarth's upbringing has schooled him to "chase the prizes" that an industrious life and hard work can provide. Unfortunately, Aysgarth and Dido are horribly mismatched, and their union

⁸³ Naomi B. Levine, Politics, Religion & Love (New York: New York University Press, 1991). Levine relies on the life and letters of Edwin Montagu for her extensive data.

is a disaster. However, ever pursuing his “ultimate prizes,” and having won Dido in marriage, Aysgarth then embarks on the pursuit of winning her heart in love. Only after he has obtained what he wants does Aysgarth realize he no longer desires it. At this point, he finds himself in a wasteland where, plagued by his uncontrolled alcoholism, his immense pride, and grand delusions of himself, Aysgarth, too, receives help from the former Fordite monk who has also become his nemesis, Jonathan Darrow. Darrow connects Aysgarth with Aidan Lucas, another Fordite monk, who leads Aysgarth through a rigorous examination of his past. He instructs him to go to his siblings and to his formidable Uncle Willoughby who had such a tremendous influence on his development, and to seek to understand the truth about his past from their various perspectives. However, in his quest to discover the truth about his parents and his childhood, Aysgarth must also confront his own sins, repent of all he has done, and seek forgiveness before he can redeem his sham of a marriage and embark on a renewed life committed to the wife who now loves him more than he loves her. Just as Christopher Bryant would recommend, Father Lucas prescribes a strict regime of abstinence, prayer, and spiritual reading as well as someone who will help Aysgarth on his journey to the peace and self-awareness for which he is searching.⁸⁴ Later in Scandalous Risks, the fourth novel of the Starbridge series, the reader witnesses Neville Aysgarth from the point of view of Venetia Flaxton, as he falls back into his sinful patterns of drunkenness and lustful behavior. Ironically, at this point in his life, it is through the intervention of his nemeses, Charles Ashworth and Jonathan Darrow, that Aysgarth comes to his senses and resumes his journey toward self-realization.

⁸⁴ Susan Howatch, Ultimate Prizes (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1989) 264-272. These recommendations are made at the beginning of Neville Aysgarth’s journey to self-awareness as described by Christopher Bryant.

While Charles Ashworth's, Jonathan Darrow's, and Neville Aysgarth's experiences on the pages of the Starbridge novels reflect their own personal journeys through sin, repentance, forgiveness, redemption, resurrection and renewal, their individual and varied theological positions aid their process toward greater self-awareness, growth toward God, and love of others. Each of these characters represents the thoughts of actual theologians and churchmen within the Anglican Church. Chapter Two of this dissertation will examine these historical figures' ideas in depth. At this point it is valid to say that Susan Howatch relied on the ideas of Father Christopher Bryant in her presentation of the overall pattern for theological reflection in the lives of her characters in the novels of the Starbridge series. However, in Chapter Three a discussion of Bernard Lonergan's theory of conversion will demonstrate the affinities between his ideas and those of Christopher Bryant illustrated here.

1.5. The Historical Milieu of Each Novel in the Starbridge Series

Before discussing the Anglican Church's position in each novel of the Starbridge series, it is necessary to demonstrate the historical milieu that each narrative depicts. This subject is indeed vast and diverse, for it covers the period of time stretching from 1937 to 1988. One only needs to recall the historical events of those years as well as the mammoth changes in the society and culture of the Western world in particular that these events precipitated to understand the challenges presented by such a topic. However, the novels themselves contain references to the historic occurrences that influenced and even

shaped their plots, and they paint an accurate picture of life in England and in the Church during the time they cover as well.⁸⁵

Glittering Images, for instance, opens in July, 1937, where the reader is immersed in England prior to World War II. References in the novel are made to the effects of the Great Depression on the working classes, while the wealthy, either because of their being part of the “landed gentry” or because they had gained some type of preferment, managed to live “the good life” even as the impending disaster caused by fascism edged its way toward England’s shores. When Charles Ashworth is commissioned by Archbishop Lang of Canterbury to investigate Bishop Jardine’s private affairs, he travels to the Episcopal palace in Starbridge where he describes the long historical past symbolized by the residence. He comments on what he sees as he approaches the palace:

At the end of the East Walk the palace gates stood open, and within seconds I was confronting the palace itself, a Victorian “improvement” on the original Tudor building which had been destroyed by fire in the last century...Smooth lawns and ancient beech trees framed the house, and above the porch the arms of Starbridge were carved in stone in a brave attempt to unite medieval custom with a wayward Victorian illusion.⁸⁶

Further on in the same paragraph, Ashworth muses on the fact that he is standing in “twentieth century England” yet he feels “a mere pace away from a past which contained the seeds of an alluring future.” If this reflects an optimistic attitude on the part of Ashworth, it is overshadowed by the actual historical realities that come to his mind at the same time, “the horrors of Hitler, the agony of the Spanish Civil War, the despair of those whose lives had been ruined by the Slump.”⁸⁷ Mirroring the “glittering image” that

⁸⁵ This claim is substantiated by the accounts of the period presented in Clayton Roberts, David Roberts, and Douglas R. Bisson, A History of England, vol. 2, 1688 to the Present (Prentice Hall: Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 2002) and Kenneth O. Morgan, ed., The Oxford History of Britain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁸⁶ Susan Howatch, Glittering Images 22.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 22.

Charles Ashworth portrays before the world, the grandeur of life at the Episcopal palace in pre-World War II England masks the treachery that was brewing across the channel and in the world at large that would eventually affect adversely every aspect of life in Britain.

Other references in Glittering Images indicate the quality of life in England before World War II, at least among the upper classes. When Charles seeks information about Bishop Jardine, he approaches Lady Starmouth who is ensconced within a pastoral scene in the vast Starbridge palace gardens as she occupies herself with sketching the landscape. Not too distant from her, the Earl of Starmouth “in his country clothes” was trying his hand at fishing while “beyond the river the herd of cows was grazing again in the meadows,” creating a “very English scene” according to Charles.⁸⁸ In 1937, the peace and tranquility so characteristic of the traditional English countryside had neither been threatened nor destroyed by modern warfare.

Still later in this first novel of the series, when Charles goes to visit the Starmouths, we catch another glimpse of idyllic pre-World War II England. Charles approaches Starmouth Court by car, but the effects of the industrial age have not yet wreaked havoc on the English countryside. He describes what he sees in the following way:

Starmouth Court, slumbering in seclusion on its wooded hillside, overlooked a stretch of the Mole Valley which was attractively pastoral. Fields framed the water-meadows by the river, and beyond the fields the hills climbed steeply to give the landscape its balance and grace. It was hard to believe...that I was less than twenty miles from my club in the heart of the West End.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Ibid. 54.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 135.

In these passages Charles reminisces about a time before industrialization and the horrors of war did much to change the countryside and life itself in England.

When the reader encounters Jonathan Darrow in the second novel of the series, Glamorous Powers, however, the year is 1940, and England is in the throes of war already. Life has changed considerably from the idyllic peaceful settings portrayed in the first novel. For instance, when Darrow takes the train to London from his own cloister at Grantchester in order to undergo a process of discernment under the guidance of his rival, Francis Ingram, who has become the Abbot General of the Fordite monks, he is “more disturbed than ever” by what he reads in *The Times*.

It seemed the French had collapsed. Pétain had ordered a cessation of the fighting and was in touch with the Nazi command. For weeks the countries of Europe had been falling to the Nazis and now after the collapse of Denmark, Norway, The Netherlands and Belgium, it appeared that France too had been conquered. Without the French we would be quite alone.⁹⁰

What troubles Darrow most of all about these world events is that they seem to mirror, as he says, “the chaos in my own psyche.” The “chaos” to which Darrow refers here is his belief precipitated by a vision that he may need to leave the monastery and resume his life in the world. Later in the novel, when Francis Ingram is trying to help Darrow work through his crisis, they must curtail their conversation because of an air-raid drill. Even Ingram remarks: “I must say, Jonathan, you’ve picked the most tiresome time in the history of the world to embark on a spiritual crisis.”⁹¹ Indeed, actual eye-witness accounts of London’s ordeal during the *blitzkrieg* serve as a tribute to the fortitude and strength of the English to endure.⁹² When he returns to his monastery at Grantchester,

⁹⁰ Susan Howatch, Glamorous Powers 25.

⁹¹ Ibid. 60-61.

⁹² “The Diary of an Air Raid,” Channel 4.com/ history, online 2 June 2008. This account contains an hour by hour description of the horrific air-raid against London on December 29, 1940.

Darrow reads in *The Illustrated London News* that the air-raids have not been limited to the city of London, but are occurring at night in the eastern counties as well. Again, he speaks of his own spiritual crisis as if it were a “microcosm” of the war between the nations, while both conflicts, according to Darrow, reflect the perpetual battle between good and evil. He thinks:

I saw the powers of light withstanding the recurrent invasions of the forces of darkness, the perpetual conflict of finite existence played out amidst the Eternal Now of ultimate reality. Britain wanted peace yet was obliged to go to war to preserve its cherished values; I wanted to serve God in tranquility yet was obliged to wage a continuous battle against the qualities which marked the opaque side of my nature.⁹³

England during World War II provides an analogous background to the interior struggles of Jonathan Darrow during 1940.

At another point in the novel, Darrow notices additional twentieth-century changes that have occurred in England as a result of industrialization in the cities and the rise of suburban living which followed. After he leaves the monastic life, he travels to visit his daughter Ruth who lives in the suburbs of Starmouth. On the way, he observes:

I saw we had reached the former village of Hartley, now transformed into a select suburb where houses reposed in spacious gardens on either side of roads entitled “The Bower,” “The Spinney” and “The Mount” by authorities determined to breathe a 1930s life into the concept of *rus in urbe*. My daughter’s home...was distinguished by a wealth of half-timbering which was no doubt supposed to recall memories of Tudor architecture.⁹⁴

It seems that a nostalgic determination to maintain the England of a pre-industrialized era influenced the growth and configuration of the suburbs too.

Darrow’s quest during his spiritual crisis eventually leads him away from the monastery into a world where he is aghast at the “violent, sex-obsessed, trivia-infested”

⁹³ Susan Howatch, *Glamorous Powers* 68-69.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 128.

newspapers. They depict an existence far from that to which he has become accustomed and different, too, from his pre-monastic days.⁹⁵ However, the vision that propelled him from the monastery begins to make sense when he meets Anne Barton-Woods and eventually asks her to marry him. Alluding to the wartime rationing and imposed shortages which cause the couple to serve as “lavish a luncheon” as possible after their wedding ceremony,⁹⁶ Jonathan then takes his bride on a modest honeymoon. Even in seclusion, however, they hear of the “battering of London [that] had been continuing night after night.” When they return from their honeymoon, and Darrow resumes reading the newspapers, he is saddened to learn that

one hundred thousand books had been destroyed in the University College Library and a bomb, crashing through the roof of St. Paul’s, had destroyed the High Altar.⁹⁷

These horrors cause Francis Ingram to write to Jon saying that “our ordeal continues.” Just as for England, the war precipitates the continuation of Jonathan Darrow’s ordeal as well. He learns that his son Martin, who is a pacifist, nevertheless enlists in the army, and that the atrocities he then faces eventually cause him to attempt suicide.⁹⁸ Still later in the novel, when he bids farewell to his good friend Charles Ashworth as the latter’s regiment heads for active duty in distant lands, Darrow is tormented further by the vision he has of Charles languishing in a wartime prison camp.⁹⁹ World War II not only shrouds the narrative of Jonathan Darrow; it actually forms the backdrop and sometimes even the substance of the progression of its plot.

⁹⁵ Ibid 136.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 243.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 264.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 282.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 322.

In the third novel of the Starbridge series entitled Ultimate Prizes, the reader comes face to face with additional effects that World War II has had on the English populace. The year is 1942. At the very beginning of the novel, Howatch contrasts the lavish dinner party given by Bishop Alex Jardine at the Episcopal palace in 1937 (which was described in Glittering Images) to that which Bishop Ottershaw and his wife are constrained to host during the war. Because of the war, the palace itself has suffered the closure of its two vast wings, and unlike the Jardines who had an array of servants, the Ottershaws have only three, a butler and two elderly maids.¹⁰⁰ Neville Aysgarth, the narrator, describes the war-time dinner and he emphasizes its compliance with the government's standards for rationing:

In the dark mysterious stew which emerged from the episcopal kitchen, lonely chunks of meat could occasionally be glimpsed swimming alongside the potatoes and carrots. Pudding consisted of bottled plums covered by a sauce which Mrs. Ottershaw tried to pass off as custard. She even said it contained a real egg, a disclosure which made me wonder if the Bishop had nobly volunteered to forego [sic] his Sunday supper that week.¹⁰¹

Only the claret provided by the Earl of Starmouth, the most aristocratic guest in attendance, according to Aysgarth, redeemed the Ottershaws' poor excuse for a dinner party necessitated by war-time conditions.

As the war continues, so, too, do the air-raids. Nine weeks after the Ottershaws' dinner party, Aysgarth reflects on the destruction caused by the *blitzkrieg* throughout England. He reports that the city of Starbridge and its cathedral have fortunately remained "intact," yet many other British cities have been destroyed.

¹⁰⁰ Susan Howatch, Ultimate Prizes 5.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 5.

Canterbury had been battered as a reprisal for the RAF's formidable raid on Cologne...meanwhile the ruins of Bath, York, Norwich, and Exeter served to remind us of the nightmare that could still come true [in Starbridge].¹⁰²

Aysgarth's wife also laments the effect of the air-raids on the human psyche, and she expresses relief that the family will "escape" them while they are away on a two-week holiday. Her husband, however, knows there is no real escape from war, and he reflects on the situation in these terms:

Following the advice of the Government, I'd warned the children about the dangers of playing with long metal tubes, metal balls with handles, canisters which looked like thermos flasks, and glass bottles of every description. It seemed unlikely that we would come across unexploded bombs in the Lake District [the Aysgarths' holiday destination], but the *Luftwaffe* sometimes jettisoned their cargo in unexpected places, and I felt nowhere in England was completely safe.¹⁰³

Obviously, the war not only destroyed the peace of the countryside. It also instilled the constant fear of destruction and even annihilation in the English people.

Inconveniences and hardships that were not life-threatening also ensued because of the war. Aysgarth tells how the little pleasures that children enjoy, such as "chocolates and sweets were being removed from the automatic machines, and at fetes and fun-fairs sweets were forbidden to be donated as prizes." Posted everywhere, government slogans, too, reminded the people to comply with war-time stringencies. "Only ask for it if you really need it; is your purchase really necessary?" complemented injunctions such as "save bread" which was then followed by "fifty different ways of serving potatoes," or "do not travel," a warning that caused a beleaguered clergyman with his wife and five children to feel guilty about taking a two-week vacation.¹⁰⁴ Yet such inconveniences

¹⁰² Ibid. 85.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 85.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 86.

amounted to very little in comparison to the compassion ignited in Aysgarth later in the novel as he witnesses young Charley Ashworth writing a letter to his father who is being held by the Germans as a prisoner of war.¹⁰⁵ The toll of war on the English people came in all sorts of ways and affected both young and old, rich and poor immensely.

One positive effect of the war occurred within the heart of Neville Aysgarth, advanced his ministry, and caused him to broaden his viewpoint on his own spiritual gifts. Although Aysgarth himself did not choose to become involved in the pastoral care of the German prisoners of war held in a camp on Starbury Plain, this “hidden ministry,” as he called it, seemed to seek him out. Aysgarth did not think that he possessed any skill at providing pastoral care; he always prided himself on his gift for administration. However, when no one else wanted or became available in ministering to these enemy soldiers, Neville Aysgarth, a former pacifist, stepped into the fray. As the tide of war turned against the Nazis, Aysgarth’s pastoral care of the German soldiers became more intense. He speaks about it in these words:

After the fall of Tobruk came the victory at El Alamein. After the losses of D-Day came the capture of Berlin. It was then, as Churchill entered the bunker of his adversary and sat in Hitler’s battered chair, that my hidden ministry began to take an unprecedented amount of my time...: my work among the German prisoners, bitter and despairing, cynical and demoralized, at their camp on Starbury Plain.¹⁰⁶

At this point in his ministry, Aysgarth is completely unaware of his powerful presence among the German prisoners. He berates himself by saying:

I was asked...to play Daniel in this den of German lions. I hated it. I did my best, but my best seemed abysmal, and I found it hard to bear the humiliation of having my weakness for pastoral work so brutally exposed.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 135.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 112.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 113.

Not until much later in the novel, when Neville Aysgarth is called to Bishop Ottershaw's office at the request of Bishop George Bell of Chichester, who always advocated a Christian attitude toward the German people,¹⁰⁸ does Aysgarth become acquainted with the impact that his pastoral care among the prisoners has had. In a letter written by Eddie Hoffenberg, one of the German prisoners, and signed by all of the other men touched by his ministry, Aysgarth receives the praise he would never shower on himself. Eddie writes to Bishop Bell:

Mr. Aysgarth brought hope where there was despair, faith where there was distrust and charity where there was only hatred and bitterness. He brought Christ to us and helped us to see the crucified God. He listened, he endured with us, he understood our sufferings, and we wanted the best bishop in England to know this, the bishop who knows that not all Germans are Nazis.¹⁰⁹

Even after such a laudatory commendation, Aysgarth still berates himself for his cowardice in not acknowledging his "hidden ministry" to anyone, lest he be thought "soft on Germans." Bishop Bell, however, believes that actions speak louder than words, and he offers Aysgarth a position in Geneva at the secretariat of the World Council of Churches. As he says: "A German-speaking clergyman with a first-class record as a pastor of POW's would have a lot to offer."¹¹⁰ Aysgarth eventually rejects Bishop Bell's offer; yet the effects of this war-time ministry on his spiritual development cannot be denied, and will be discussed further when we analyze his conversion experience in Bernard Lonergan's terms in a later chapter.

A second positive effect of the war influenced another character that appears in Ultimate Prizes, namely Jonathan Darrow. One of the duties of Neville Aysgarth,

¹⁰⁸ George Kennedy Allen Bell is an actual historical figure who was Bishop of Chichester from 1929 to 1957. See the "Author's Note" in Ultimate Prizes 436.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 312-313.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 319.

Archdeacon of Starbridge, entails the supervision of the Theological College. He acquaints us with the problem regarding the College that the war has precipitated:

By that time, the May of 1946, the college was facing the problem of accommodating all the men who had received a call to the ministry during the war and who were now free to embark on their training. In an effort to meet this challenge, Darrow had conceived the idea of opening a temporary extension of the College at his home.¹¹¹

This plan gives Aysgarth another problem with which he must deal; however, it plays a positive role in the spiritual development and conversion of Jonathan Darrow. This will be analyzed at greater length in a future chapter with regard to Darrow's conversion experience.

Whereas the first three novels all deal with the period prior to, during, and immediately after World War II, the last three novels largely relate events that occur in the 1960s. Scandalous Risks, the fourth novel of the Starbridge series, actually begins in 1988, but soon flashes back to the year 1963 and continues recounting the story of Neville Aysgarth, although from the point of view of Venetia Flaxton, a young woman who falls in love with him. The fifth novel of the series, Mystical Paths, also begins in 1988, but almost immediately reverts back to 1968 and relates the experiences of Nicholas Darrow, Jonathan Darrow's son. The last novel of the series, Absolute Truths, starts in 1975, but flashes back to 1965, a life-changing year for Charles Ashworth, the character from whose point of view the entire series begins and ends.

Some of the changes that occurred in the society and culture of England over the course of the series are reflected in the life experiences of two characters from the younger generation, Venetia Flaxton in Scandalous Risks and Nicholas Darrow in

¹¹¹ Ibid. 208.

Mystical Paths. These characters both demonstrate the turning in the sixties, especially among the rebellious young, to various means that would seemingly heighten experience or deaden the pain of existence. In addition, the wide dissemination of birth control aided in making promiscuous sexual encounters an anesthetic against either the boredom of everyday life or its tragedies. Life in the sixties also moved at a faster pace. For instance, people traveled faster in an increased number of automobiles that ran on superhighways and the music of the period resounded with a faster beat as rock and roll blasted from radio and television. This stepped-up pace of life left the individual more isolated and alienated than ever from meaningful relational contact or productive endeavors.

For a wealthy, intelligent young woman like Venetia Flaxton, the possibilities for improving one's position in society were rather limited. She might have gone to Oxford, but as her friend Primrose Aysgarth reminded her, this "would reduce [the] chance of marrying to nil...and there's no doubt spinsters are always regarded with contempt."¹¹² However, her existence in her father's house which consisted of "sipping gin, smoking cigarettes, and soaking up the sexual reminiscences of St. Augustine" had to be abandoned for more worthwhile pursuits, and so Venetia opts to attend secretarial school. She thinks that this will be her passport to "Real Life," which she characterizes as being

the world beyond my mother's gardens and my father's clubs, a world in which people actually lived—swilling and swearing, fighting and fornicating—instead of merely existing bloodlessly in charity committee meetings or in cloud-cuckoolands such as the Athenaeum and the House of Lords.¹¹³

Venetia wants to replace the *ennui* she experiences within her parents' home with what

¹¹² Susan Howatch, Scandalous Risks (New York; Fawcett Crest, 1990) 52.

¹¹³ Ibid. 51-52.

she imagines are the promises of life in the sixties. In fact, she trades one languishing lifestyle for another. Once on her own working as a secretary, she becomes involved with a “coterie” of well-to-do young people who drown their boredom in orgies and alcohol, and eventually she even flirts with and encounters disaster in an illicit, though not consummated, love affair with Neville Aysgarth. From her vantage point in 1988, Venetia thinks back to 1963 and to the life she assumed when she left her father’s house. In doing so, she characterizes the early part of this revolutionary decade for those who were young and of means:

I remember the Orgy, that innocent affair; if it had been a real orgy we would have called it a party—or possibly, later in the sixties, a happening...It’s hard to remember the exact quality of that lost era, but in 1963 if one was under thirty one lived in a world of untarnished dreams and ideals, unpolluted gaiety and adventure. Except for nicotine and alcohol, drugs were seldom encountered—and who needed pot when one could get high on Veuve Clicquot? Drugs were for riff-raff in those days, and we were the opposite of riff-raff; we were the *jeunesse dorée*...¹¹⁴

If there was any hope that the free-spirited nature of the sixties would end with a favorable outcome, Venetia’s thoughts a while later indicate what really happened:

I can see us all with such painful clarity, sophisticated yet innocent, fast but not corrupt—and above all so mercifully blind to that terrible time ahead when the enchanted *communitas*, the group-spirit, of the early sixties fell apart and terminated in chaos.¹¹⁵

The “chaos” to which Venetia refers here in Scandalous Risks is what Nicholas Darrow describes in 1968 in the fifth novel of the series, Mystical Paths. Toward the beginning of the narrative, he remembers a psychic “vision” he had while at the “coterie’s” orgiastic party of 1963. In that vision Nicholas “sees” the future of his companions and when he recalls it, he describes the outcome for many young people of the 1960s:

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 140.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 140.

That *jeunesse dorée*...all glittering in the Light...I knew the Dark was closing in on them, I knew the Coterie was doomed...I looked at Dinkie, the steamy brunette, and knew she'd become a walking Corpse...I looked at Christian's brother Norman and knew his body would rot long before he died. I looked at Norman's wife Cynthia and heard her screaming in a locked room. I looked at...Holly Carr and felt the pain as she slashed her wrists. I looked at Katie Aysgarth's brother Simon and knew the waters would close over his head.¹¹⁶

Each one of these characters meets the fate that Nicholas had envisioned. The fast-paced life of the sixties took its toll on the young people who were caught up in the rebellion and freedom this decade inspired.

Besides alcohol and eventually drugs, sex, too, became an antidote for the existential pain that plagued the young especially in the sixties. The ordinand Nicholas feels he must justify his promiscuity by confessing that he went "steady with one girl at a time—and usually only seeing her once a week." At first, he's proud that he "changed girlfriends no more than once a year." However, he confesses why this habit changed:

Goaded on by the mind-blowing boredom of College life, I traded them in every six months. Doreen was a waitress at The Copper Kettle, Angie was a salesgirl at Boots, and Tracy, like Debbie, was a little dolly-bird typist.¹¹⁷

Not until 1968, the year of his ordination, does Nicholas get his life into some apparent order. At this point he limits his sexual gratification to "sleeping with Tracy," while he nurtures a long-term legitimate relationship by "taking home Rosalind." Despite the fact that he knows that leading this "double life" is morally wrong, he refuses to do anything about it. Furthermore, imprisoned under the banner of the sixties that promoted sex as the cure for all ills, Nicholas eventually goes to bed with three other women of his own social class for selfish reasons. He manages, however, to deceive himself into thinking that he has sex with these women in order to "heal" them. Nicholas deceives himself

¹¹⁶ Susan Howatch, *Mystical Paths* (New York; Fawcett Crest, 1992) 49.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 22.

first by thinking that having sex with Katie Aysgarth will “cure” her of her grief over her husband’s death.¹¹⁸ He deceives himself a second time by believing that having sex with Marina Markhampton will “heal” her of her poor self-image.¹¹⁹ Finally, after having sex with Venetia Hoffenburg, whom he calls his “friend,” he admits the truth about all of these sexual encounters.

We were using sex as an anaesthetic to escape from situations beyond our power to master, and in using sex we were abusing each other. It was a sin, as they used to say in the old days...But although the religious word had lost its power, the reality to which it pointed was still strong as a sword designed for disembowelment. The modern word which points to that reality is alienation.¹²⁰

The sexual revolution of the 1960s occurred for a variety of sociological reasons, not least of which was a desire to escape the existential pain experienced by a lost generation cast adrift among the waves of an ever-changing sea.

At the beginning of the last novel of the Starbridge series, Absolute Truths, Charles Ashworth thinks back to 1965, the year in which he faced the greatest challenge of his life, the death of his second wife Lyle. He comments on the fact that “society was certainly changing with great speed in the 1960s” and this causes him to consider the reasons why, as Bishop of Starbridge at the time, he assumed the role of “defender” of tradition:

How we all hanker after ideals, after certainties—and after absolute truths—which will provide us with security as we struggle to survive in the ambiguous, cloudy, chaotic world which surrounds us! ... In a rapidly changing society ideals may appear to be swept away by a rising tide of cynicism ... [yet] people will continue to hunger for those ideals, even when absolute truths are no longer in fashion.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 97-98.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 124.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 222.

¹²¹ Susan Howatch, Absolute Truths 4.

As the plot of Absolute Truths unfolds, Ashworth discovers that, although he has always maintained a conservative stance on issues of sobriety and sexuality and always upheld his “ideals,” the real life situations in which he finds himself cause him to make certain choices he never imagined he would make. For instance, in the midst of his great grief over Lyle’s death, he has a sexual encounter with a deceased clergyman’s widow named Sheila.¹²² Repentant of his actions in Sheila’s regard, he goes to see his spiritual director Jonathan Darrow, but instead ends up confiding in Darrow’s homosexual actor son Martin, who becomes a compassionate friend in need.¹²³ Most important of all, because of his admitting that he failed to live up to his own stringent ideals, Ashworth is moved to compassion when he encounters Desmond, a wayward priest he might have formerly judged harshly. He thinks to himself:

In the face of such appalling self-knowledge, stripped of all illusions, one can only repent, and in the face of such repentance one can only be forgiven, and in the face of such forgiveness one can only receive healing and bestow it. I was witnessing the process of salvation. I was witnessing redemption.¹²⁴

In choosing to act out of character, so to speak, in abandoning his ideals on several occasions, Ashworth actually gains a whole new perspective on himself and on the people around him. In Chapter Four, a discussion of Charles Ashworth’s growth in compassion will be shown to be a major step in his process of conversion. The changes that occurred in society during the 1960s, like those in Ashworth’s life, may have produced deleterious short-term effects. However, as one of the major themes of Absolute Truths contends: “All things work together for good to them that love God.”¹²⁵

¹²² Ibid 320.

¹²³ Ibid. 333-344.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 346. See Chapter Four, page 217 for a more complete quotation of Ashworth’s thoughts regarding Desmond.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 621.

In other words, every situation in an individual's life, as well as in society, contains the hope of redemption.

This brief sketch of the historical *milieu* contained in each novel helps to demonstrate and comprehend the position of the Anglican Church within the time period described. In the first three novels, where World War II predominated as the major force that shaped life in England, the Church helped to maintain some form of stability in a country plagued and then devastated by war. As more and more men especially went abroad to fight the enemy, the Church supported the war-time effort by allowing eligible clergymen to enlist, as represented in the situation of Charles Ashworth. At the same time, the duties of the clergymen left on the home front were expanded to meet the needs of the people. So it was that men like Neville Aysgarth developed special ministries, even a "hidden ministry" to German prisoners of war. In other instances, clergymen's duties were modified; someone like Jonathan Darrow, for instance, coming out of monastic life, assumed the leadership of a local congregation when the pastor enlisted. In one way or another, the Church of England sought to serve the needs of the English people and those Christians living in England during a profound time of crisis. This is not to say that the divergent theological views that have always existed in the Anglican Church and which can broadly be defined as conservative, liberal, and mystical were not present during war time. They continued to seethe beneath the surface and sometimes even created conflict on the local level. However, the principal goal of the Anglican Church became the same as that of England: the preservation of freedom and the defeat of the powers opposed to it.

During the last three novels that describe the historical situation of the 1960s principally, the conservative, liberal, and mystical stances within Anglicanism revived amid a changed and rapidly changing society. While there were those churchmen and theologians, represented by Charles Ashworth, who sought to maintain the traditional teaching of the Church, there were those other voices, epitomized in Neville Aysgarth, that desired to restate Christianity for a generation of modern people. When these two diverse viewpoints came into conflict, a common thread, like that of mysticism, could be invoked to reconcile them. In Chapter II of this dissertation, an analysis of the various ideas promulgated by different churchmen and theologians who represent these three stances within Anglicanism and whose writings inform the novels of the Starbridge series will be presented and discussed.

1.6. Theological Issues Facing the Church of England in Each Novel

From the very beginning of its existence, the Church of England has been characterized by a certain comprehensiveness that has guaranteed its richness as well as its diversity. During the English Reformation of the sixteenth century, for example, the Church of England repeatedly swayed between the tenets and practices of Rome and those of European Protestantism.¹²⁶ The desires of the ruling monarch or the political exigencies of the time influenced the direction toward which the Church of England leaned in its belief and practice at any particular historical moment. Even today the Church of England exhibits the characteristics of both Catholic as well as Protestant

¹²⁶ David L. Edwards, Christian England: From the Reformation to the Eighteenth Century, vol 2 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983) 31-126.

influences, a fact that contributes to its being known as the *via media* within Christendom. Furthermore, the ideas of Richard Hooker in his masterpiece The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity have also contributed to the breadth of theological diversity that exists within the Church of England, for it was he who expounded the belief that Scripture, Tradition, and Human Reason are the foundations and determinants of the Christian Church.¹²⁷ By articulating this theory, Hooker opened the font of human speculation and thought that has bred and nurtured the contributors to Anglican theology right down to the present day. Furthermore, since the Anglican Church is the established religion of England, many of its bishops have occupied privileged positions as statesmen and advisors to the monarch who appointed them. Thus on many occasions, they helped to shape both political as well as religious policies at home and abroad. The churchmen and theologians in the six novels of the Starbridge series demonstrate these characteristics of the Church of England. For instance, early in the first novel of the series, Glittering Images, the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Cosmo Gordon Lang, tells Charles Ashworth how he deplores Bishop Alex Jardine's speech in the House of Lords advocating the extension of the grounds for divorce proposed in a bill by A. P. Herbert. According to the Archbishop, by doing this, Jardine has not only opposed Christian teaching; he has criticized the Archbishop himself who has maintained a neutral position on the bill.¹²⁸ This is but one example of how English churchmen's entanglements in the political affairs of the realm can help shape policies while breeding dissension within their own ranks.

¹²⁷ David L. Edwards, Christian England: From the Reformation to the Eighteenth Century, vol. 2 98-102.

¹²⁸ Susan Howatch, Glittering Images 5-6.

Even in the last novel of the series, Absolute Truths, the reader finds that Charles Ashworth himself, now Bishop of Starbridge, is encumbered with many duties that go far beyond those within the Church. He considers the extent of his duties and their demands on his time when he thinks:

I was required to worry about the government's plans to scrap the 11-plus examination and establish comprehensive schools; I was planning to make a speech on the subject in the Church Assembly ... and I was framing a speech for the House of Lords about curbing hooliganism by restricting the hours of coffee-bars.¹²⁹

In speaking about these political affairs, Charles reveals his conservative nature. In fact, throughout the Starbridge series, he represents the conservative orthodox theologian who emulates his two heroes: St. Augustine, who, he says, "proclaimed the absolute truths to the end", and St. Athanasius, who was "resolutely *contra mundum*." As Charles remembers:

By 1965 I had decided that I, like my two heroes, was being obliged to endure a dissolute, demoralized, disordered society, and that my duty was to fight tooth and nail against decadence.¹³⁰

Charles never abandons his conservative theological stance throughout the novels, although it is challenged by other churchmen as well as by the circumstances of his life.

If Charles Ashworth symbolizes the conservative theologian/bishop/statesman, Neville Aysgarth represents the liberal Protestant within the novels. Of course, Ashworth and Aysgarth clash on both theological and practical issues, especially when the former holds the position of Bishop of Starbridge and the latter, that of Dean of the Cathedral. In 1963, the year when John A. T. Robinson published his controversial Honest to God, Aysgarth defends and chooses to fashion his life according to the ideas in this book.

¹²⁹ Susan Howatch, Absolute Truths 6.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 4.

Ashworth, on the other hand, not only speaks out against Robinson's proposals, he writes a rebuttal of them in a work he entitles A Modern Heresy for Modern Man.¹³¹ Such diverse theological perspectives nurtured within the Anglican Church account both for its richness as well as its tendency to sow seeds of disunity.

These two churchmen, Charles Ashworth and Neville Aysgarth, who hold leadership positions in the same cathedral close, oppose each other not only on theological grounds but also in practical matters. Although Charles Ashworth's liturgical practice would not be classified as Anglo-Catholic generally, still at one point he would "like to experiment with the idea of making the Eucharist the main service on Sunday morning." Of course, Aysgarth, whose liturgical preferences are decidedly Protestant, opposes this suggestion with the words: "Over my dead body."¹³² In another instance, acting without the consent of the cathedral's governing body, Aysgarth, as Dean of the Cathedral, commissions a statue for the Cathedral grounds which many see as having more to do with pornography than with religion. Eddie Hoffenberg, one of the canons of the cathedral, describes the explosive situation over this sculpture that is brewing between Ashworth and Aysgarth in these terms:

... We're far too busy praying for a resolution to our eternal Problem ... How to prevent our Bishop and our Dean killing each other.¹³³

From his conservative viewpoint, Ashworth judges everything that Aysgarth says and does as "scandalous." Aysgarth, on the other hand, sees Ashworth and everything for which he stands as retrogressive in a church that needs to address modern times.

¹³¹ Ibid. 5.

¹³² Susan Howatch, Scandalous Risks 368.

¹³³ Ibid. 368.

Conservative and liberal opinions on any number of related topics come and go in the Church of England, but the timeless mystical strand that permeates all of Christendom can sustain Anglicanism in its moments of greatest upheaval. So it is within the Starbridge novels as well. Between the conservatism and “Middle Way” practices of Charles Ashworth and the liberal low-church Protestantism of Neville Aysgarth, stands Jon Darrow, the Anglo-Catholic mystic, who helps move both of these churchmen standing at theological and liturgical extremes toward redemption and reconciliation. When Ashworth and Aysgarth seek the counsel of Jon Darrow toward the end of Absolute Truths, Charles reflects on

how mysticism always streamed forth in a tide of renewal whenever the liberals and the conservatives of the Church had fought themselves to a standstill.¹³⁴

In the Starbridge series of novels, at least, if not always in reality, the author Susan Howatch seems to suggest that the wisdom and skill of a mystic such as Jon Darrow can succeed in recreating unity through understanding and compassion amid what might be called a destructive diversity.

In presenting the diverse theological perspectives of the three main characters in the Starbridge series, Howatch succeeds in maintaining a sense of historical veracity because each of them embodies the viewpoints of several major churchmen and theologians of the period. Howatch even uses excerpts from several of these theologians’ writings to introduce the themes of each chapter and to help propel the plot forward. For example, the conservative orthodox ideas of Charles Ashworth align themselves with those of Austin Farrer, one of the most distinguished intellectuals in the Church of England during the twentieth century. Jonathan Darrow, the Anglo-Catholic mystic, on

¹³⁴ Susan Howatch, Absolute Truths 575.

the other hand, reflects the neo-Platonism of William Inge, the famous dean of St. Paul's Cathedral. The low-church, liberal Protestant Neville Aysgarth mirrors the theology of Charles Earle Raven and the situational ethics of John A. T. Robinson. The thoughts of several other theologians, such as Christopher Bryant, Herbert Hensley Henson, Michael Ramsey, Reginald Somerset Ward, and William H. Vanstone that appear in the novels also help to demonstrate the diversity within the theological *milieu* of the Church of England. Several of these theologians' ideas and their relation to the Starbridge novels have already been discussed. Chapter Two of this dissertation will discuss the conservative, liberal, and mystical strands within Anglicanism in light of these theologians' works and as Susan Howatch represents them in the six novels of the Starbridge series.

Chapter 2

Historical/Theological Perspectives of Three Movements in Anglicanism

2.1. Introduction

This chapter will present a brief historical background of the Church of England. Then the history of classical mysticism and its influence within Anglicanism will be shown. In conjunction with this presentation, the life and thought of William Ralph Inge, a formidable writer on mysticism, will be discussed. Next, the history and influence of modern Protestant liberalism within Anglicanism will be demonstrated, and the life and thought of two modern Protestant liberals, Charles E. Raven and John A. T. Robinson will be explored. Lastly, the history and influence of conservative orthodoxy with Catholic leanings will be discussed, and, as one of its foremost proponents, the life and thought of Austin Farrer will be examined.

2.2. Historical Background of the Church of England

Before launching into a discussion of three major theological movements in Anglicanism that are encountered in the Starbridge Series, namely, classical mysticism, modern Protestant liberalism, and conservative orthodoxy, it is necessary to establish the fact that the church in England has always been characterized by diversity both in theology and liturgical practice. As early as the middle of the seventh century, differences arose in northern England over the date of Easter. This occurred because of the Celtic influenced practices introduced by missionaries from Ireland that clashed with those propagated by missionaries from Rome. Convened toward the end of the seventh century, the Synod of Whitby under the direction of the great abbess Hilda achieved a victory for Rome as far as the date of Easter was concerned, but Celtic practices continued to prevail in the monasteries.¹

Another disagreement that bred diversity involved who was the head of the church in England. In the eleventh century, Lanfranc, the Archbishop of Canterbury under William of Normandy, supported the king as head of the church in England, but his immediate successor Anselm, who regarded the pope as Christ's vicar on earth, extended his allegiance to Rome. This struggle for supreme power over the church in England reached a high point in the great dispute that led to the murder of Thomas Becket on December 29, 1170, in his own cathedral under the rule of Henry II. However, with Becket's death, the church actually triumphed over the state. Much later, Henry VIII recognized the ramifications of this martyr's victory when, in 1538, he took steps to have Becket's shrine destroyed and his bones scattered.

The power struggle between Rome and the English throne continued until Henry VIII, who ruled from 1509 to 1547. By this time the Reformation was afoot on the continent. Although early in his reign he had written a treatise opposing Luther on the sacraments, thus earning for him the pope's gratitude and the title "Defender of the Faith," it was Henry who finally broke the hold of Rome on the church in England. Still, although he was proclaimed "Supreme Head of the Church in England" by Act of Parliament, Henry himself wavered in his independence from Rome. In 1539 he issued the Six Articles Act which was supposed to abolish diversity of opinions while it actually upheld Roman practices.²

After Henry died, his son Edward VI, who reigned from 1547 to 1553, assumed the throne, but not the power as king. This fell to a council of regency that was protestant-bent and that had been appointed by Henry before his death. Under the direction of the council and continuing as Edward assumed authority, the Six Articles were not only repealed, but many Roman practices were abolished. As Archbishop of Canterbury under Henry VIII and especially under Edward VI, Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556), together with reforming bishops such as Hugh Latimer (1485-1555) and Nicholas Ridley (died 1555), developed new doctrinal standards for the eucharist, clerical celibacy, the role of images in places of worship, and the veneration of the saints. Revisions to these doctrines and practices were promulgated all over England through the First English Prayer Book of 1549 and the Second English Prayer Book of 1552, which were

¹ John R. H. Moorman, A History of the Church in England (London: A & C Black Publishers, Ltd., 1973) 19. Celtic practices still prevailed in the cut of a monk's tonsure, feet-washing at baptism, and the consecration of the bread and wine by two priests.

² Ibid. 177-178. Of decidedly Roman bent, the Six Articles Act consisted of the following: the truth of the doctrine of Transubstantiation, the adequacy of Communion in one kind only, the necessity of clerical celibacy, the obligation of chastity to be observed by the laity, especially ex-nuns and lay-brothers, the importance of private masses, and the necessity of private confession.

written under the direction of Cranmer, and also through the Homilies and other publications.³ However, Edward VI died at the age of sixteen, and Henry's daughter by Catherine of Aragon, Mary I, who was a devout Roman Catholic, came to the throne. Mary's policy involved undoing all that her father and brother had done and restoring the Church of England to communion with Rome.⁴ Her actions brought about the martyrdom of Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley, as well as almost three hundred other reformers.⁵ In the end, Mary's reaction to Protestantism came too late. With the promulgation and acceptance of many protestant doctrines and practices throughout the realm and the savagery of the persecutions that Mary's reactionary policies fostered, this Queen's attempt at a Counter-Reformation in England must surely be declared a disaster.⁶

By the time of Elizabeth I, who reigned from 1558 to 1603, three diverse groups existed within the church in England. There were those who were in power and who had supported Mary in her desire to return to Rome. In addition, there was also a Protestant party; some of these constituents had gone abroad to await better days and some had simply remained quiet anticipating the return of their like-minded brethren after Mary's reign. A third party also existed that wanted to be free of subservience either to Rome and Catholicism or to Geneva and Protestantism. These latter really hoped for a Church of England that would be catholic in its essential doctrine and yet reformed and cleansed of any abuses from the Middle Ages. In what came to be called the Elizabethan Settlement, the Queen showed her definite protestant leanings without being heavy handed. With the Act of Supremacy in 1559, the legislation enacted under Henry VIII

³ Ibid. 181-187

⁴ Ibid. 191-193.

⁵ Kenneth O. Morgan, ed., The Oxford History of Britain (Oxford: University Press, 1988) 297-298.

and Edward VI, with the exception of the Six Articles, was reinstated. This meant that the administration of the Eucharist was to be to the laity in both kinds and that all ecclesiastical and lay officials were to swear an oath of allegiance to the Queen as supreme governor of the Church and State. This act alone would have satisfied Elizabeth, but the protestant contingent exerted its pressure until Parliament passed the Act of Uniformity that reinstated the use of the Prayer Book of 1552, with a few alterations. For the most part the Elizabethan Settlement was carried out with remarkably little opposition; however, pressure from both the Romanists and the Genevans did not totally abate.

Theoretically, by the end of Elizabeth's reign, the Anglican Church should have been characterized by uniformity; still, in reality there was great diversity within its ranks. The old Marian clergy paid lip-service to the laws passed under Elizabeth while they secretly celebrated Mass in Latin. At the other extreme were the Puritans who hated the Prayer Book and the episcopacy and who devised rites that would certainly have been opposed by the queen. Between these two were all sorts of opinions. In the end it was the clergy and laity who decided what kind of ritual took place in the local church according to rubrics that they loosely interpreted.⁷

During the seventeenth century diversity continued in the Church of England. William Laud (1573-1645) Archbishop of Canterbury under Charles I, promoted a High Church policy and strict uniformity in the Church of England while Puritan influences

⁶John R. H. Moorman, A History of the Church in England 197. Many of the clergy had married wives and begotten children and this created social problems as well as a good deal of antagonism to the Queen when they were told they had to give their families up.

⁷ Ibid. 216-218.

received a huge impetus from a civil war. A group of churchmen now known as the Caroline Divines supported the concept of Anglicanism as a *via media*, while among the Puritans there arose those who came to be known as the Cambridge Platonists because of their mystical bent. At the feet of the Cambridge Platonists sat those who were called Latitudinarians; these were Cambridge men who believed intensely in reason and who were tired of religious controversy. All of these religious strands existed within the Church of England in the seventeenth century and they have continued in some form to the present day.⁸

Several movements have defined Anglicanism since the eighteenth century and have continued to promote diversity within its ranks. One of these was the Evangelical Revival that gave an important stimulus to the Reformation tradition within Anglicanism. Evangelicals emphasized conversion, the supremacy of Scripture, and gospel preaching. Their theology might be called a “moderate” Calvinism. It was based on the doctrine of total depravity, which necessitated conversion, justification by faith, the centrality of the atonement, and sanctification by the Holy Spirit.

In the nineteenth century, another shaping force within Anglicanism was the Oxford Movement. Proponents of this movement emphasized the historic continuity of the church through the apostolic succession of bishops and through the sacraments. This latter movement emphasized the Catholic heritage of Anglicanism. It led to the restoration of liturgical practices and sacramental teaching associated with Roman Catholicism, greater emphasis on the priestly office, and a deepening of devotion.

⁸ Perry Butler “From the Early Eighteenth Century to the Present Day,” *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty and Jonathan Knight (London: SPCK, 1988) 35-39. Laud’s High Church policies were propagated by the Oxford Movement in the nineteenth century and still are present in Anglo-Catholic churches today; the sentiments of the Latitudinarians appear in the Liberal and Broad Churches of

A third influence within Anglicanism came from Latitudinarian churchmanship in the eighteenth century which, together with biblical criticism and theological liberalism in the nineteenth century, questioned the nature of belief and the traditional understanding of authority. Latitudinarians favored a “latitude” of opinion in religious matters; the form of church government, the liturgy, and controversial doctrines were not matters of great importance. Latitudinarians sometimes veered toward anti-Trinitarianism and even Deism; basically, they viewed Christianity as a religion consisting of a few simple truths accessible to reason.

From a certain perspective it might seem that there exists a three-party conflict among Evangelical, Catholic, and Liberal understandings of the faith within the Church of England; however, in actuality these diverse strands help to account for the comprehensiveness of Anglicanism.⁹

2.3. Classical Mysticism

Before discussing the history and influence of classical mysticism within Anglicanism, perhaps a definition of mysticism in general is warranted. According to Evelyn Underhill, mysticism

is essentially a movement of the heart, seeking to transcend the limitations of the individual standpoint and to surrender itself to ultimate Reality; for no personal gain, to satisfy no transcendental curiosity, to obtain no other-worldly joys, but purely from an instinct of love. ... Mysticism, in its pure form, is the science of ultimates, the science of union with the Absolute, and nothing else, and ... the mystic is the person who attains to this union, not the person who talks about it.¹⁰

Anglicanism; and the thoughts of the Cambridge Platonists are perpetuated in the practice of Anglican spirituality.

⁹ Ibid. 30-31.

¹⁰ Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (New York: The New American Library, 1955) 71-72.

Underhill believes that Christianity was especially prone to developing the temperament of the mystic, and so mystical writings have dotted the historical landscape of the Church from the very beginning.¹¹ Underhill recognizes two great streams of spiritual thought that nourished the Middle Ages. The first was practical and based on the mystical writings of John Cassian and St. Gregory the Great; it was most prevalent in the monasteries where the rule of St. Benedict prevailed. The second was Neo-Platonic and had its roots in the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite and St. Augustine. Both of these tendencies can be found in the mystical writers within Anglicanism.

Because the monasteries established in England gradually adopted the Rule of St. Benedict in the eighth century, we may assume that the practical form of mysticism geared toward the development of the spiritual life was in existence there. Then in the thirteenth century Margery Kempe (c. 1290) wrote her “Contemplations,” a portion of which has survived, and this, too, reveals a practical approach to the spiritual life.

It was not until the fourteenth century, however, that a flourishing of mystical writers appeared in England. The first of these was Richard Rolle of Hampole (c. 1300-1349) whom Evelyn Underhill calls “the father of English mysticism.”¹² A hermit, who was educated in theology at Oxford and Paris, Rolle wrote The Fire of Love which described his intense experiences as he sought union with God. Couched in musical

¹¹ Ibid. 455-456. Among the earliest mystical writers of the Church, Underhill includes St. Paul and the author of the Fourth Gospel as early missionary mystics. In the patristic period, she mentions St. Augustine (354-430) and Dionysius the Areopagite (who wrote between 476 and 525). Among the Egyptian Desert Fathers, Underhill names St. Macarius of Egypt (c. 295-386) and John Cassian (c. 350).

¹² Ibid. 77.

imagery, the *Incendium Amoris* was first written in Latin, but for practical reasons and because the unschooled sought his guidance, Rolle translated this work into English. The second half of the fourteenth century produced the unknown author of The Cloud of Unknowing, a work which demonstrates the influence of the Neo-Platonic Dionysius the Areopagite. While this work was highly psychological and exhibited the thoughts of an advanced contemplative, the mystic Walter Hilton (c. 1396) wrote for a wider audience. His great work, entitled “The Scale of Perfection,” demonstrated Hilton’s supreme skill at being a spiritual director guiding others in the ways of practical mysticism. The last of the great fourteenth century mystics in England was Julian of Norwich (1343-after 1413). Her Revelations of Divine Love express a clear faith in the cross and passion as the ultimate triumph of love.

Although mysticism continued to be fostered in the Church of England through the propagation of these writings, it did not flourish again until the seventeenth century. A tendency toward the mystical apprehension of reality can be seen in the poetry of John Donne (1573-1631), George Herbert (1593-1633), and Thomas Traherne (1637-1674). Donne and Herbert belonged to a group of poets that Samuel Johnson called “metaphysical” because their poems are full of “conceits,” that is, comparisons that function within the poem itself but which otherwise would be considered inappropriate.¹³ Metaphysical poetry is difficult to read and must be pondered in order to glean the various levels of meaning contained therein. In such poems, images taken from the physical world lead to a deeper understanding of spiritual realities.

Thomas Traherne, however, has been associated with a group of writers known as

¹³ Richard H. Schmidt, Glorious Companions: Five Centuries of Anglican Spirituality (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 49.

the Cambridge Platonists.¹⁴ These men sought to find a harmony between philosophy and religion; their hope was to offset the bitter controversies of their day. On the one hand, they spoke out against the dogmatism of the Puritan divines which they considered anti-rationalist and, on the other hand, they combated the materialist writings of philosophers like René Descartes and Thomas Hobbes who denied the idealistic nature of the universe. For the Cambridge Platonists, religion and reason were in harmony; reality was comprised not of sensation but of intelligible forms that exist behind perception. As Plato had thought, universal Ideas inform matter, and therefore the senses alone are an unreliable means to know reality. As Moorman writes, the Cambridge Platonists believed

God is one; Truth is one; in the world of the Spirit harmony must take the place of strife. Their appeal, then, was to Reason, the ‘very voice of God’ as Whichcote termed it; and by Reason they meant the philosophical approach to truth sanctified by God.¹⁵

Furthermore, the Cambridge Platonists’ understanding of reason was mystical; they believed that the mind is an echo of the divine in the human soul. Hence reason might permit the private revelations of the Puritans and the rituals and liturgy of the Established Church. In this way the Cambridge Platonists insisted on moderation between the two leading factions in the church at the time. In practice, the Cambridge Platonists devoted themselves to prayer and meditation as they sought true holiness. If they lacked a substantial number of followers in their own day, they did revive the mystical strand

¹⁴ Moorman, *A History of the Church in England* 254-255. The Cambridge Platonists were members of Emmanuel College, the Puritan community at the university. The group included Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683), Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688), John Smith (1618-1652) Henry More (1614-1687), and Nathaniel Culverwel (died 1651).

¹⁵ Ibid. 255.

within the Church of England and influenced those who came after them who were of a similar bent.

The mystical thread continued to be sewn into the fabric of Anglicanism through the later works of William Law (1686-1761), who actually spent the last years of his life serving as the spiritual director to two wealthy women. Like the Cambridge Platonists, Law wrote that the soul is an eternal spark of the divine.¹⁶ Mysticism also appeared in the poetry of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries through the efforts of such notable writers as William Blake (1757-1827) and William Wordsworth (1770-1850).

The ideas of the Cambridge Platonists appeared again in the twentieth century in the works of William Ralph Inge (1860-1954), a theologian on whom Susan Howatch based the character of the mystic Jonathan Darrow. Although Howatch claimed that Inge himself “wrote as a nonmystic,” he did write on mystical topics using a “scholarly approach which matched the practical, unsentimental character of...the mystic Jonathan Darrow.”¹⁷ Besides writing over thirty-five books, Inge was a noted churchman of his day. Born in Crayke, Yorkshire, England, Inge was the son of a provost of Worcester College, Oxford, and the grandson of the archdeacon of Cleveland. Inge himself was educated at Eton College where he was a King’s and a Newcastle Scholar. He also studied at King’s College, Cambridge, and won a number of prizes as well as taking firsts in the Classics. In 1888, while serving as a tutor at Hertford College, Oxford, Inge was ordained a deacon in the Church of England and in 1892, he was ordained a priest.

Herbert Hensley Henson, then Rector of St. Margaret’s, Westminster, and later Bishop of

¹⁶ Schmidt, *Glorious Companions* 98.

¹⁷ Susan Howatch, “The Starbridge Novels and Twentieth Century Anglican Theology,” *Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch*, ed. Bruce Johnson and Charles Huttar (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2005) 243.

Durham, offered Inge the living of All Saints', Ennismore Gardens, in 1904. With this appointment Inge made his way to London.¹⁸ He also married Mary Catherine Spooner at this time. By 1907, Inge held the Lady Margaret's Professor of Divinity chair at Jesus College, Cambridge. In 1911 Prime Minister Asquith chose Inge to be the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, a post he occupied for twenty-three years. After he retired, Inge continued writing, producing his most famous work Mysticism in Religion when he was eighty-eight years old.¹⁹

William Ralph Inge came in contact with the works of Plotinus and the Neo-Platonists in 1895. This encounter stimulated his interest and the results of his studies were the famous Bampton Lectures delivered in 1899, which were later published as Christian Mysticism. As the Cambridge Platonists had done before him, Inge believed that the mystical experience of God was impervious to the attacks on the institutional church that were prevalent in his day. He also maintained that diverse theological and philosophical opinions could not affect the indomitable truth attained through mystical experience.

It is this powerful belief in the fruits of mysticism that the character of Jon Darrow exhibits in the Starbridge Series. In the midst of his own spiritual crises, Darrow provides the balance between the conservative orthodox views of Charles Ashworth and the liberal protestant position of Neville Aysgarth. In quoting from the writings of William Ralph Inge, Susan Howatch reflects the stance of Jonathan Darrow within the novels:

¹⁸ Susan Howatch, author's note, Glamorous Powers (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1988) 407.

¹⁹ "William Ralph Inge," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, vol.13 by George William Gilmore (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1954) 491.

Besides the combative Catholic and Protestant elements in the Churches, there has always been a third element, with very honourable traditions, which came to life again at the Renaissance, but really reaches back to the Greek fathers, to St. Paul and St. John, and further back still. The characteristics of this type of Christianity are—a spiritual religion based on a firm belief in absolute and eternal values...[and] a confidence that these values are knowable by man...²⁰

Furthermore, Inge believes that these absolute values can be apprehended by human beings when “intellect, will, and affections” are applied to the endeavor. Reflecting Inge’s beliefs, Jonathan Darrow thinks:

Profound religious truths are eternal; the man-made divisions of Christendom, trapped in time, are subject to corruption, and because of this no man-made institution should be allowed to interpose itself in a dictatorial fashion between the mystic and his God...²¹

It is belief in these eternal truths and in mystical experience that informs the behavior and thought of Jonathan Darrow and that makes him an invaluable resource for both Ashworth and Aysgarth in their conflict with each other and on their own spiritual journeys during the course of the novels.

The heart of William Ralph Inge’s thought can be found in both Christian Mysticism and Mysticism in Religion. Written when he was eighty-eight years old, Mysticism in Religion reiterates much of what Inge wrote in his Bampton Lectures published as Christian Mysticism, but in the later book his tone is one of an old friend revisiting treasured companions. Turning to Christian Mysticism, one finds that Inge presents a historical analysis of mysticism. He begins by defining mysticism generally as “the attempt to realize, in thought and feeling, the immanence of the temporal in the eternal, and of the eternal in the temporal.”²² According to Inge, human

²⁰ William Ralph Inge, The Platonic Tradition in English Religious Thought, “author’s note,” Glamorous Powers by Susan Howatch 408.

²¹ Susan Howatch, Glamorous Powers 148.

²² William Ralph Inge, Christian Mysticism (New York: Living Age Books, 1956) 5.

beings can achieve this because of what he calls “three articles of faith”: 1. the soul can see and perceive; 2. in order to know God, one must be a partaker of the divine nature; and 3. without holiness no one can see the Lord. The first of these principles defines the soul as the faculty for discerning spiritual truth; the second acknowledges the spark of the divine within each of us and for which we must, nevertheless, search; and the third principle pertains to the process of purgation, illumination, and contemplation that a person must undergo in order to achieve union with the deity.

According to Inge, at least two problems do arise within Christian mysticism. First, it is necessary to reconcile the Absolute of philosophy with the God of religion who is in no way evil. In order to account for evil in the world without resorting to dualism, mystics define evil as having no substance. Inge notes and agrees that

...a sunny confidence in the ultimate triumph of good shines in the writings of most of the mystics... The Cambridge Platonists are all optimistic; and in the beautiful...*Revelations* of Juliana of Norwich, we find...the refrain of “All shall be well.”²³

Besides the problem of evil, speculative mysticism also tends to lead directly into pantheism. This occurs because the unity of all existence is a fundamental doctrine of mysticism. “God is in all, and all is in God,” Inge writes, and he quotes St. Bonaventure as saying: “His [God’s] centre is everywhere, and His circumference nowhere.”²⁴

Christian mystics such as Scotus Erigena deal with this tendency toward pantheism by proposing an *anima mundi*, that is, a “world soul.” Inge quotes Erigena who writes: “Be well assured that the Word—the second Person of the Trinity—is the Nature of all things.” By this, Inge explains, Erigena means that “the Logos is a cosmic principle, the

²³ Ibid. 26.

²⁴ Ibid. 28.

Personality of which the universe is the external expression or appearance.” Personality is, after all, the strictest unity of which we have experience, but according to the mystics, we cannot achieve our full personality except in eternity, in union with the Lord. The mystics, therefore, take very seriously Christ’s words: “He that will save his life”—his soul, his personality—“shall lose it; and he that will lose his life for My sake shall find it.” As Inge writes: “The false self must die--nay, must ‘die daily,’ for the process is gradual, and there is no limit to it.”²⁵

Inge continues in Christian Mysticism to locate the mystic’s stance first in Holy Scripture and then down through the ages in history. In the Old Testament, for instance, passages such as Jeremiah 31:31-34 in which the Lord God speaks of “writing his law on the hearts of his people who will then know him” resonate with mystical imagery. Both Psalm 15 and 24 contain the same allusions as this passage in Jeremiah and thus they also reveal a mystical temperament.²⁶

Although the Synoptic Gospels have their mystical elements,²⁷ Inge considers the Fourth Gospel as the consummate expression of mysticism. Inge even writes that Christian mysticism might be called instead Johannine Christianity. Several characteristics make this Gospel warrant this title. First of all, in the Gospel and First Epistle of John, God the Father is designated as “Love,” “Light,” and “Spirit.” These three qualities are so much a part of God that they usher us into his presence. Secondly,

²⁵ Ibid. 31. As the Logos is to the world, so is perfected personality to the individual, that is, our soul in union with the divine, the goal of the mystic.

²⁶ Psalm 15 speaks of “Those who walk blamelessly and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart,” and Psalm 24 reiterates this idea with the words: “Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts.” These passages seem to allude to the mystical stage of purgation.

²⁷ William Ralph Inge, Christian Mysticism 44. Such mystical concepts as the indwelling of Christ or the Holy Spirit, the unity of Christ and his members, and the law of gain through loss or life through death are all present in the Synoptic Gospels.

John identifies Christ as the “Logos” which is the “Word” or “Reason” of the philosophers. As Inge says, according to St. John, the Logos is not “merely the instrument in the original creation—but the central Life, the Being in whom life existed and exists...”²⁸ Third, as in mystical theology generally, the Incarnation rather than the Cross is the central fact of Christianity in the Fourth Gospel. Thus “The Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us” is its supreme dogma. The revelation of God in Christ is complete, but the Comforter’s purpose is to reveal the Son by a process of gradual illumination.²⁹ Fourth, in order to see the kingdom of God one must be born again of water and the Spirit. For St. John, this baptism precedes a total dedication of self, in faith. “Faith begins with an experiment,” Inge writes, “and ends with an experience.”³⁰ One might also add an experience of love, for faith is very much entwined with the love of God. Lastly, in St. John’s Gospel there are a host of symbols or signs which point to a deeper reality. The words wind, water, bread, shepherd, and vine, for instance, all point to truths that go to the heart of the Christian’s relationship with our Lord.³¹ For these main reasons Inge claims that St. John’s Gospel is the mystical Gospel *par excellence*.

Besides St. John’s Gospel, Inge finds many mystical ideas in the Epistles of St. Paul. First of all, St. Paul claims that Jesus Christ revealed himself to him. Knowledge of the mystery of Christ came to him through the Holy Ghost, not through his senses or

²⁸ Ibid. 46.

²⁹ Ibid. 48-49.

³⁰ Ibid. 50.

³¹ Ibid. 58-59.

through the use of his reason.³² Secondly, knowledge of the mysteries of God comes after proper initiation or cleansing. This means, as 2 Corinthians 7:1 states: “Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit.” Here is represented the mystical stage of purgation. Thirdly, the person who has the spirit dwelling within has the “mind of Christ.” This is a dangerous assertion, Inge admits, but one which Paul made because he was finally free from the “Law” that had led him into error.³³ Fourth, the individual must live through and experience personally the redemptive process of Christ. Inge writes: “The life, death, and resurrection of Christ were for him [Paul] the revelation of the law, the law of redemption through suffering.”³⁴ Fifth, Inge claims that the Logos of St. John is identical with the Pauline Christ depicted in the Epistle to the Colossians.³⁵ Sixth, Inge quotes St. Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians where the Apostle speaks of our being transformed into the same image of Christ from “glory to glory.” Like Christ, Inge writes, our body will one day be “*clothed upon*” with our heavenly habitation.³⁶ Seventh, Paul speaks of our unity with Christ not in individual terms, but as an organic unity of all people.³⁷ Lastly, Inge recalls the eighth chapter of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans where he writes of Christ’s victory over sin and death affecting all of creation. Inge writes: “This recognition of the spirituality of matter, and of the unity of all nature in Christ, is one which we ought to be thankful to find in the

³² Ibid. 60.

³³ Ibid. 62.

³⁴ Ibid. 64.

³⁵ Ibid. 65-66. Inge quotes the Epistle to the Colossians: “The son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth; all things have been created through Him, and unto Him; and He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.”

³⁶ Ibid. 67.

³⁷ Ibid. 68. Inge quotes Romans 12:5: “We being many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another.”

New Testament.”³⁸ With these points Inge demonstrates that the essentials of mysticism are found in St. Paul’s Epistles as well.

After discussing some of the major mystical elements in Holy Scripture, Inge presents a historical summary of mysticism from the second century to the present day. He examines the Platonic elements in the writings of such figures as Justin Martyr, who he claims called “Plato, together with Heraclitus and Socrates, Christians before Christ.”³⁹ Inge states further that

In the Middle Ages the mystics almost canonized Plato: Eckhart speaks of him...as ‘the great priest’; and even in Spain, Louis of Granada...finds in him ‘the most excellent parts of Christian wisdom.’ Lastly, in the seventeenth century the English Platonists avowed their intention of bringing back the Church to ‘her old loving nurse’ the Platonic philosophy.⁴⁰

According to Inge, Platonic philosophy was wedded to Judaism in the philosophy of Philo (70-135 A.D.) and this remarkable system “anticipated the greater part of Christian and pagan Neo-Platonism.”⁴¹ Philo claimed that God was pure being, without qualities and ineffable. Our knowledge of God comes from God dwelling in us. “He has breathed into us something of his nature, and is thus the archetype of what is highest in ourselves.”⁴² Philo wavers between conceiving God as transcendent and immanent; his Judaism will not allow him to believe in a God totally devoid of all qualities, totally transcendent. Philo also states that the Logos dwells with God as His wisdom. Referring to Philo’s concepts, Inge says: “He [the Logos] is the ‘second God,’ the ‘Idea of Ideas.’ The Logos is also the mind of God expressing itself in act; the Ideas, therefore, are the

³⁸ Ibid. 68-69.

³⁹ Ibid. 77.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 78.

⁴¹ Ibid. 85

⁴² Ibid. 83

content of the mind of God.”⁴³ It is through the Logos that the world is made. According to Inge, Philo even calls the intelligible universe “the only and beloved Son of God.”⁴⁴ The Son represents the world before God as High Priest, Intercessor, and Paraclete. “He is the divine Angel who guides us. He is the eternal image of the Father, and we, who are not yet fit to be called sons of God, may call ourselves His sons.”⁴⁵ The images used in Philo’s philosophy echo those used to refer to the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity. In fact, Inge contends that Christian Neo-Platonism did identify the Logos with the Second Person of the Trinity and with the *Nous* or Mind of Plotinus. However, Philo makes no attempt to identify the Logos with the Jewish Messiah, nor is there even a hint of Incarnation in his presentation.

If the writings of Philo anticipate Christian and pagan Neo-Platonism, those of Plotinus (205 A.D.) represent a further development. In Plotinus’ thought, the world is an image of the Divine Mind which is itself a reflection of the One Absolute Good or Beauty or Truth. St. Augustine also speaks of God in these terms. Quoting Plotinus, Inge writes: “What more beautiful image of the Divine could there be than this world, except the world yonder?”⁴⁶ According to Plotinus, it is our love of Beauty that will lead us to true Beauty in the Mind of the One, if we do not become entangled in sensuous beauty. Thus the universe resembles a vast chain and every being is a link. Everything flows from the center (the One) and gravitates back to the center. This is Plotinus’ theory of emanation that is often viewed in opposition to evolution.⁴⁷ However, Neo-Platonists

⁴³ Ibid. 84.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 84.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 85.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 93 quotes Plotinus’ *Enneads*. iv. 8. 1.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 94.

do not see emanation as a process in time, and therefore, according to Inge, it does not contradict the theory of evolution.

In Glamorous Powers, Susan Howatch portrays Jonathan Darrow praying in Neo-Platonic terms when he finally enters the actual chapel of his vision that had occurred as he says, “out of time and space.” He is lost in contemplation as these images come to him:

Then I prayed in images: the classical architecture of the chapel, symbol of Beauty, one of Plato’s three absolute values; the spire of the Cathedral at Starbridge, symbol of another absolute value, Truth; the cross on the summit of the spire, symbolic of Christ and of that third absolute value which Plato had called Goodness and which the Christians had exalted as Love.⁴⁸

As the images reflecting both Platonic and Christian realities multiply in his mind, Darrow continues to pray in stillness as he surrenders himself to the will of God, as Inge suggests a mystic must.

With consummate knowledge and skill, Inge then continues in Christian Mysticism to trace the ideas of practical and speculative mysticism found in St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, the pre-Reformation schools of Tauler, Suso and Ruysbroek, and the Reformation tradition of German mysticism. He concludes his discussion with an examination of the nature mysticism in the works of the poets William Wordsworth and William Blake. In a letter to Inge’s wife, Herbert Hensley Henson praises the writings of William Ralph Inge for their “range of knowledge, and easy

⁴⁸ Susan Howatch, Glamorous Powers 193.

mastery in handling.”⁴⁹ Indeed, a perusal of Inge’s works reveals that this assessment is not unwarranted.

2.4. Modern Protestant Liberalism

The roots of modern Protestant Liberalism may be located in the seventeenth century. A group of men who sat at the feet of the Cambridge Platonists, but who lacked their depth and learning, came to be known as Latitudinarians.⁵⁰ The Latitudinarians were tired of religious controversy and opposed any intensity of religious feeling. They believed in reason and advocated a religion that was based on common sense. This led to their being accused of Socinianism, but actually all they desired was a religion that lay within the range of ordinary people. John Locke’s The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures, published in 1695, supported this idea by advocating for a Christian faith based on reason, simplicity, and morality. Locke’s approach to the Bible was scholarly and profound; yet he believed the essentials of the true faith could be apprehended by reason alone.

At the same time, another impetus to the glorification of reason, the basis of liberalism, came from Deism which is thought to have had its beginning in the works of Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648). He aroused an interest in a religion of nature devoid of creeds, formularies, and priesthood. Then, in 1696, John Toland published Christianity not Mysterious in which he tried to reduce the faith to only what was natural

⁴⁹ Herbert Hensley Henson, Letters of Herbert Hensley Henson, ed. Evelyn Foley Braley (London: SPCK, 1950) 17.

⁵⁰ Moorman, A History of the Church in England 255. This group included Joseph Glanville (1636-1680); Simon Patrick, Bishop of Ely (1626-1707); Edward Stillingfleet, Bishop of Worcester (1635-1699); and two Archbishops of Canterbury, John Tillotson (1630-1694) and Thomas Tennison (1636-1715).

and reasonable. Some years later, in 1730, Matthew Tindal wrote Christianity as Old as the Creation. This work is sometimes called the “Deist’s Bible” because it emphasizes the harmony of nature and the moral law. According to Tindal, there is no need for revelation of any sort, and certainly no need for the Incarnation. Although Deism wore a Christian mask, it actually undermined the faith with its emphasis on nature interpreted by reason alone.

While the Evangelicals’ trademark became enthusiasm and that of the High Church Party, ecclesiasticism, the liberal movement in Anglicanism has always stood for reform based on reason. Advocates of liberalism have traditionally called for the interpretation of Scripture that is not bound to the creeds, for changes in the Prayer Book, and for a greater toleration of both dissenters and Roman Catholics.

With the publication in English of Adolf von Harnack’s What is Christianity? in 1901, the seeds of modern Protestant liberalism blossomed in the Church of England. Harnack’s ideas changed the trend in theological discussions from biblical infallibility to the more pressing question at the time: “What think ye of Christ?” A problem arose because modern man, with his knowledge of science and biblical criticism, could not account for the divinity of Christ. Especially troublesome to explain were the miraculous elements in Christ’s life such as the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection. Debate over these issues simmered in the Church of England for a while, but in 1907, J. R. Campbell, a Congregationalist minister, published The New Theology in which he suggested that the divinity of Christ was simply a supreme example of God’s indwelling. In other words, Campbell held that Christ’s divinity differed only in degree, not in kind, from that found in everyone else. This idea was considered heretical and prompted Charles Gore, a

champion of orthodoxy, to write The New Theology and the Old Religion later in the same year in response to Campbell.⁵¹

Modernism continued to occupy the minds of men during and after the First World War. The playwright George Bernard Shaw expressed what came to be its statement of aims in the preface of Back to Methuselah written in 1921. Shaw wrote:

We desire to extricate the eternal spirit of religion from the sludgy residue of temporalities and legends that are making belief impossible, though they are the stock-in-trade of all the Churches.⁵²

The proponents of modern Protestant liberalism believed that the theory of evolution in science and the critical method in history demanded that the great truths of Christianity should not be abandoned, but that they should be restated in a way that was suitable to the intellectual climate of the time. In 1921, an important Conference of Modern Churchmen was held at Girton College, Cambridge, to discuss “Christ and the Creeds.” Then, in 1927, H. D. A. Major, the author of English Modernism, proposed a new statement of the Christian faith expressed in terms of the love of God and a basic creed that would be acceptable to Romanists, Anglicans, Quakers, and Unitarians alike. This caused a great stir in the Church of England which prompted Archbishop Davidson to establish a Commission on Christian Doctrine under the direction of William Temple to set down once and for all what the Church of England really believed and taught. The report of this commission entitled Doctrine in the Church of England was published in 1938.⁵³

Into this theological climate Charles Earle Raven was born in 1885 in London to John Earle Raven, a barrister, and Alice Comber. In 1904 Raven won a classical

⁵¹ Ibid. 398-399.

⁵² Ibid. 423-424

⁵³ Ibid. 425.

scholarship to Cambridge where he received first honors in both the Classics and in Theology. He also studied biology and held a firm belief that science and theology could be reconciled. After attending Cambridge, Raven served as Assistant Secretary for Secondary Education under the Liverpool Council (1908-1909). It was in this capacity that he became familiar with the impoverished condition of the masses. In 1909 Raven was ordained in the Church of England and then he was appointed Dean of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, a post he held until 1914. During the First World War, he served as a front-line army chaplain from 1917 to 1918. It is believed that this experience moved him to become a pacifist later on in life. After the war, Raven returned to Emmanuel College for a time before accepting the position of Rector of Bletchingley, Surrey, where he remained from 1920 to 1924. Then in 1924 he was appointed Residentiary Canon of the new Cathedral in Liverpool, a post he held until 1932. While at the cathedral, Raven devoted himself to establishing an informal evening service that succeeded in attracting large congregations and creating a true sense of fellowship. He also became a renowned preacher during his tenure at the cathedral. In 1932 Raven returned to Cambridge as Regius Professor of Divinity, a position he held until 1939, when he was made Master of Christ College.⁵⁴

It was well-known that Raven enjoyed the company of women. He married his first wife while studying at Cambridge as an undergraduate; together they had four children. Raven's first wife died in 1944, and he remained a widower until 1954 when he married Ethel, widow of John Moors of Boston. Unfortunately, Ethel died a short time after their marriage. In 1956 Raven then married H  l  ne Jeanty, a former Belgian

⁵⁴ Heidi Poon, "Charles Earle Raven: A Biography" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953) giffordlectures.org, online, 22 Oct. 2008.

resistance worker, and the couple settled in Cambridge and Brussels until 1964 when Raven himself passed away.⁵⁵

Raven devoted his life passionately to abolishing the rift between science and theology, between that which we can see and observe and that which we hold simply on faith. Early in his writings he articulated an “emergent evolution.” In The Creator Spirit he attempted to dispel the antipathy between those who believed in the creation story of Genesis and those who adhered to Darwin’s theories. He did this by defining a “record of development from the atom to the saint.” Accordingly, God is active in the seven stages or levels of emergence that Raven traces in the universe. These include the creation of 1. atoms; 2. molecules; 3. solids; 4. life; 5. mind; 6. reason; and 7. spirit.⁵⁶ In this way Raven discards the standard biblical representation of creation as a process occurring in six days. However, he maintains that God is active at each point in the creation of everything in the universe, even in the inevitable struggle for existence. Such is his belief expressed in these words:

...that woven into the very woof and warp of the universe is the pattern of the Cross, that Nature is baptized in the Spirit of Jesus, that man’s creation was accomplished by the same means as his redemption.⁵⁷

For Raven there is no distinction between the work of God and that which we observe in nature. It is all one. Orthodox theologians would criticize this pantheistic belief on the grounds that it undermines the unique position of Jesus Christ. Still, it is Raven’s beliefs that Susan Howatch has the character of Neville Aysgarth express in the third novel of

⁵⁵ Susan Howatch, introduction, Science, Religion and the Future by Charles Raven (London: Mowbray, 1994) viii.

⁵⁶ Charles Earle Raven, The Creator Spirit (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928) 82-83.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 124.

the Starbridge series, Ultimate Prizes. Quotations from Raven's works introduce and inform the chapters of this novel.

In the Appendix to The Creator Spirit, Raven states what he has attempted to demonstrate throughout the entire book. Just as all of a person's individual resources must be used in order to understand the meaning of one's existence in community with others, so must all of the forms of human activity be tapped in order to uncover the mysteries of the universe. However, Raven believes that if philosophy, religion, aesthetic appreciation, and poetry are important to this process of discovery, so, too, is science.

Thus Raven writes:

I am also concerned to affirm that the scientific method takes its place as one of the realms of experience, providing for us a series of answers limited in their essence, but infinite in their scope.⁵⁸

In his search for truth, Raven stresses that no one discipline can give us a "full picture of the real"; only a synoptic viewpoint can help us achieve such a visualization. Moreover, Raven admits that it is not yet clear to what extent the objects that science observes and measures are responsible for producing changes in the psychic and mental faculties of human beings. In other words, Raven suggests that we do not know to what extent the biochemical components of an individual's brain, for instance, influence the way he/she thinks and acts. In proposing that there is a connection between the physical and mental faculties and, not only a connection, but an interplay that is necessary for a person to be able to function, Raven placed himself in the mainstream of twentieth century scientific thought.

⁵⁸ Ibid., appendix, 288.

Raven's belief in the necessity of tapping all of human knowledge in approaching matters of faith is echoed in these words written by Neville Aysgarth to his protégé Dido Tallent:

We [Modernists] believe in interpreting Christianity in the light of modern knowledge. Consequently we welcome all scientific advances—in geology, anthropology, psychology, chemistry, physics and so on—and use them as a springboard to an expanded spiritual enlightenment.⁵⁹

Although modernists are open to scientific advances, Aysgarth stresses a little later on that genuine modernists “hold fast to the Divinity of Christ, the Resurrection and the concept of Eternal Life,” although just “how Jesus was the Son of God and in what manner he was resurrected and in what sense one is to interpret ‘Eternal Life’...are open to constant revision in the light of modern knowledge.”⁶⁰ In stating these beliefs, Aysgarth not only reflects Raven's thoughts, he also distinguishes himself from those radical modernists whom he himself calls “eccentric crackpots,” who give the Modernist movement a bad name.

Turning to Science, Religion, and the Future, one notes that Raven first presents a history of science in England up to and including the evolutionary theories of Darwin. He demonstrates how the rift between science and religion gradually occurred because the proponents in each field limited themselves to their own respective points of view. Thus he describes the doctrine of the Anglican Church as being

of the ‘judicious Hooker’ and the more orthodox of the Caroline Divines...of the patristic age as expressed in Athanasius...and in Cyprian...It is a *via media* but with a character of its own, orthodox but not intolerant, comprehensive but hardly liberal, systematic but in an easy-going English fashion.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Susan Howatch, Ultimate Prizes (New York: Fawcett Press, 1989) 57.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 57.

⁶¹ Charles Earle Raven, Science, Religion and the Future (London: Mowbray, 1994) 62. This was first published in 1943.

Raven continues characterizing the Church of England as a good representative of Victorian England, conscious of the mystery that requires proper decorum in worship combined with a practical concern for the “cure of souls, the redress of social evils and the extension of missionary effort.” According to Raven, however, for all the good that the Anglican Church accomplished in his time, it remained largely unaware of the changes that had occurred in human life and thought since the seventeenth century.

Nor, according to Raven, did the proponents of science do anything but departmentalize and specialize in their own field of interest. “Departmentalism was inevitable” writes Raven, “for it took a lifetime of study to attain eminence in any line of research.” Coupled with this extreme specialization, there was also a blind belief in progress that Raven characterizes in this way:

A strange irrational faith in the automatic improvement of human life, based only upon a shallow view of evolution and a blinkered ignorance of what other men in other fields of effort were doing.⁶²

This way of thinking led to a false sense of security that human life could only get safer, healthier, happier and more divine. Ironically, Raven recalled that this first surge of optimism ended in the bloodbath of the First Great War and, at the time he was writing these words in 1943, around him was blazing World War II.

Raven seeks to heal the split between science and religion by advocating the same method of observation, testing, induction, and the formulation of hypotheses for all fields of study, including history and theology. Indeed, he suggests that this is how a baby or a teacher learns as well as the process that the founder of Christianity urged his disciples to follow. For instance, when Jesus sent the disciples on their first evangelistic mission, he

⁶² Ibid. 63

urged them to observe the recipients of their message before deciding whether to continue preaching or to leave. Raven claims that there is nothing highly original, nor does anyone have a monopoly on the epistemological process he summarizes in these words:

Open your eyes and see; test and notice the consequences; grasp the significance of your observations; act upon it as a means to further discoveries.⁶³

Some may object to using this method in the fields of history or theology because these venues, unlike science that deals with the repetition of occurrences under controlled circumstances, involve events like the death of Socrates or Christ that happened only once and that cannot be controlled. However, Raven points to both the appearance of a new nebula or the extinction of the dinosaur as objects of scientific study that are similar to those of history or theology. Thus science, too, is often involved in the study of one-time events that cannot be predicted.

Raven also writes that everything in the universe is in a continuous process of becoming that can be observed and studied. As he states:

If the universe of our experience is studied and described as a whole, it displays a continuous process, neither mechanical in its operation nor inevitable in its outcome, but nevertheless moving, with a vast and most impressive impulse, towards a recognizable if still remote end.⁶⁴

This end of the creative process, according to Raven, is union with God, the God who is both embodied in the creative process of all things at all levels and the same God who is incarnated in the Christ. Mystical experience approximates this union with God, but, for Raven, Christ is the perfect man “released from self-imprisonment into communion with

⁶³ Ibid. 86.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 111.

God and a new relationship with his fellows.”⁶⁵ Thus at the conclusion of Science, Religion and the Future, Raven arrives at the fundamental reason for which he has desired to ally science and religion. His task has led to the recognition of our need to find an adequate symbol for religious experience, or union with God. This symbol is the “perfect man,” the Christ who interpreted God for us and by so doing has brought us closer to the Almighty. Such a symbol has not only brought us into union with God, it has also released us from our own self-centeredness in showing us perfect God-in-man. The result is that we are led into deeper communion with each other.⁶⁶ All of this is accomplished by what Raven calls “honest study, a truly scientific testing of the data for the fact of Jesus,” and interpretation of this study, which “will necessarily lead to the effort to express our convictions in our way of life.”⁶⁷ For a liberal Protestant like Raven, Christ, then, becomes a mere model of the perfect man that we are all called to emulate.

Another liberal theologian on whose ideas Susan Howatch based those of Neville Aysgarth is John Arthur Thomas Robinson (1919-1983). Quotations from Robinson’s Honest to God and various published statements about the book are used as introductions to the chapters in Scandalous Risks, the fourth novel of the Starbridge series, which deals with Neville Aysgarth in the 1960s. Born in Canterbury, England and educated at Jesus College, Cambridge, John A. T. Robinson earned a degree in Classics, a first in Theology and a doctorate in Philosophy. He was ordained in 1945 after which he became a curate at Bristol and a chaplain at Wells Theological College, Cambridge, as well as a Lecturer

⁶⁵ Ibid. 120.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 121

⁶⁷ Ibid. 122-123.

in New Testament on the University Faculty of Divinity in 1951. Although he was not yet forty years old, Robinson became an assistant bishop at Woolwich and then Bishop of Woolwich in 1959. Robinson seems to have been a figure who enjoyed controversy, for in 1960 he was a witness for the defense in the prosecution of Penguin Books for publishing Lady Chatterley's Lover. Less than three years later, Robinson published Honest to God which gained world-wide notoriety as a restatement of Christianity for modern times. Then, in 1969, Robinson returned to Cambridge as Dean of Chapel at Trinity. He continued to publish works on the New Testament but he became more and more conservative in his later years.⁶⁸

In Honest to God Robinson raises questions about the language and the concepts used by Christians to speak about the Deity. According to a modern-day literal interpretation of Biblical tradition, the universe is popularly considered to be a three-tiered structure with God pictured above in heaven; earth, below; and hell, beneath the earth. More recently, claims Robinson, God has been envisioned not “up there,” but “out there,” somewhere beyond our perception. In modern times, however, science has proven that this kind of language is not only fallacious; it denigrates the very concept of God. Robinson seeks to rectify this situation by proposing to refer to God as Paul Tillich suggested. Accordingly, God is the “Depth of Existence, the Ground of our Being.” Quoting from a sermon preached by Paul Tillich in England in 1949, Robinson describes God in these terms:

The name of this infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being is *God*. That depth is what the word *God* means. And if that word has not much meaning for you, translate it, and speak of the depths of your life, of the source of your being, of your ultimate concern, of what you take seriously

⁶⁸ Susan Howatch, author's note, Scandalous Risks (New York, Fawcett Crest, 1990) 467-468.

without any reservation.⁶⁹

Robinson contends that speaking of God in terms of “depth” has more relevance for modern people than posing a God who is either “up there” or “out there.”

The second controversial proposal that Robinson makes in Honest to God is based on what Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggested in his Letters and Papers from Prison. There Bonhoeffer spoke of Christianity as a system of belief that appeals to those who feel a need for religion and a need for a God to whom to give themselves. However, Robinson wonders about those in modern times who no longer feel this need or a desire for personal salvation or a sense of sin. How can Christianity speak to these people? To answer this question, Robinson poses a “religionless” Christianity, as Bonhoeffer had described it. Robinson confesses that he does not completely understand Bonhoeffer at this point, but he is, nevertheless, willing to adopt his terminology.⁷⁰

The third German theologian who influenced Robinson in his writing of Honest to God was Rudolf Bultmann. After reading the latter’s New Testament and Mythology, which was published in 1941, Robinson was challenged to admit that the mythological language in the New Testament (such as pre-existence, incarnation, ascent and descent, miraculous intervention, cosmic catastrophe, etc.) that should make its contents believable are the very things that seem incredible and that hinder belief. As Robinson writes:

Thus, modern man, instead of stumbling on the real rock of offence (the scandal of the Cross), is put off by the very things which *should* be translating that historical occurrence into an act of God for him...⁷¹

⁶⁹John A. T. Robinson, Honest to God (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963) 22.

⁷⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (New York; Simon and Schuster, 1997) 280-282. Bonhoeffer questions the significance of the church, community, a sermon, the liturgy, in short, the “things” of Christianity in a world where the Second World War is raging, and people seem to be “religionless,” lacking any metaphysical perspective or any interiority or any need for God.

⁷¹ John A. T. Robinson, Honest to God 24.

Thus Robinson who claims to have been born “into the heart of the ecclesiastical establishment”⁷² does not doubt the fundamental truth of Christianity. He merely wants to alter how it is expressed so that its major doctrines can be understood and appropriated by people in the modern world.⁷³

Robinson also finds the terms in which the Incarnation has traditionally been treated inadequate and misleading. He maintains that the Definition of Chalcedon merely restated the problem; it did not resolve it. As decreed by the Council of Chalcedon, Jesus Christ is defined as being fully God and fully man and yet one person. On the one hand, Robinson criticizes this statement of Christology on the grounds that it breeds Docetism. Thus he writes:

In fact, popular supranaturalistic Christology has always been dominantly docetic. That is to say, Christ only appeared to be a man or looked like a man: “underneath” he was God.⁷⁴

On the other hand, such a supranaturalistic Christology affords Robinson the opportunity to question the entire premise on which it is based. He writes:

For as long as God and man are thought of as two “beings”, each with distinct natures, one from “the other side” and one from “this side”, then it is impossible to create out of them more than a God-man, a divine visitant from “out there” who chooses in every respect to live like the natives.⁷⁵

That Robinson does not agree with Chalcedon’s Christological language is obvious from these statements; however, neither does he accept the naturalistic approach of Liberal Christianity. From this perspective, Christ becomes “the most God-like man

⁷² Ibid. 27. Robinson’s father was a canon to Canterbury Cathedral when he was born.

⁷³ Ibid. 28. Robinson merely wants to be honest to God and about God in adopting new ways of expressing the Deity.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 65.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 67.

that ever lived” or “human raised to the power of ‘x’”.⁷⁶ Instead, Robinson proposes a Christology based on what Jesus said of himself in the New Testament. There “Jesus never claims to be God, personally: yet he always claims to bring God, completely.”⁷⁷ Robinson thus prefers to adopt Paul Tillich’s Christology which characterizes Jesus as the final revelation of God. Quoting Tillich, Robinson asserts:

He who is the bearer of the final revelation must surrender his finitude—not only his life but also his finite power and knowledge and perfection. In doing so, he affirms that he is the bearer of final revelation (the “Son of God” in classical terms).⁷⁸

Ultimately, it is on the kenotic theory, a complete self-emptying, that Robinson bases his restatement of Christology because this doctrine is one that has meaning for people in the modern world. In answer to the question: What is Christ for us today? Robinson claims that

Jesus is “the man for others”, the one in whom Love has completely taken over, the one who is utterly open to, and united with, the Ground of his being, and this “life for others, through participation in the Being of God”, is transcendence.⁷⁹

If one accepts this revised definition of the Incarnation, then only one step remains to be taken in order to arrive at an ethical system based on the unconditional love of Jesus, “the man for others.” In fact, Robinson maintains that love alone is the only criterion on which to judge the morality of any human act. He states:

Love alone, because, as it were, it has a built-in moral compass, enabling it to “home” intuitively upon the deepest need of the other, can allow itself to be directed completely by the situation.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Ibid. 68

⁷⁷ Ibid. 73.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 73-74. Robinson is quoting here from Tillich’s *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, p. 148.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 76.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 115. Robinson is referring to Joseph Fletcher’s ‘ethic of the situation.’ here. See Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966) 57.

Robinson does admit that an ethical system such as this is “highly dangerous.” Yet he is positive that it is the only viable ethic for “man come of age.”⁸¹

In Scandalous Risks, Susan Howatch fashions Neville Aysgarth into the standard bearer for this kind of thinking. In a discussion Aysgarth has with Venetia Flaxton justifying his illicit relationship with her, he says:

...if you love God—which is the purest, noblest sort of love—you should be able to love your fellowmen in the same way and then the love will both protect you from sin and steer you into the paths of righteousness.⁸²

Aysgarth continues in this vein of thinking but admits that adultery is “*prima facie* wrong.” However, he convinces himself, and Venetia along with him, that

If...a married man found himself in a *truly* loving relationship with a woman who was not his wife, there would be no adultery because he would love that woman enough to abstain from any behavior which was morally wrong.⁸³

This is John A. T. Robinson’s liberal situation ethics in practice, and it is the primary force that directs Aysgarth’s actions with regard to Venetia Flaxton in Scandalous Risks, the fourth novel of the Starbridge series.

2.5. Conservative Orthodoxy with Catholic Leanings

Conservative orthodoxy with catholic leanings has always been associated in Anglicanism with the idea of a *via media*, a church that is both catholic and reformed. During the reign of Elizabeth I, from 1558 to 1603, it became necessary for the Church of England to define itself on its own terms, distinct from either Roman Catholicism or Calvinist Protestantism. To this end Matthew Parker (1504-1575), the Archbishop of

⁸¹ Ibid. 117

⁸² Susan Howatch, Scandalous Risks 165.

⁸³ Ibid. 165.

Canterbury under Elizabeth I, helped keep the Church of England rooted in the tenets and practices of the early church. These were distinguished from the medieval doctrines that were well-established in Roman Catholicism and that were thought by the Reformers to have corrupted it. Parker also influenced the writing of the Thirty-Nine Articles that kept Anglicanism free from the doctrinal extremes of either Roman transubstantiation or Calvinist predestination.⁸⁴ In addition, the theologian John Jewel (1522-1571) defended the Church of England against the cries of heresy from Rome. He, like Parker, demonstrated the alignment of Anglicanism with the words of Christ, the writings of the apostles, and the testimonies of the catholic fathers. At the same time, Richard Hooker (1554-1600), a disciple of Jewel, also helped portray the Church of England as a *via media* between Roman Catholicism and Calvinist Protestantism. Hooker stressed the necessity of using church tradition and reason when interpreting the Scriptures. Although he was Archbishop of Canterbury under the despotic king Charles the First, William Laud (1573-1645), too, continued in the way of Jewel and Hooker by upholding the Church of England as both catholic and reformed. As a High Churchman, Laud demanded strict obedience to the bishops and to the Prayer Book; where he found breaches of order or discipline, he did not hesitate to punish those whom he considered to be offenders. Laud's policies, coupled with his unbridled temper, put him out of favor with his contemporaries; however, he gave his life to the establishment of a national church that was the *via media* between Rome and Geneva.

⁸⁴The Thirty-Nine Articles also rejected the Roman doctrine of Purgatory, the use of any language but the vernacular in church services, and the recognition of the Pope as supreme head of the church. The Articles upheld the two Gospel sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, the delivery of Holy Communion in both kinds to the laity, and the marriage of Bishops, priests, and deacons.

Conservative orthodoxy was then fostered in the seventeenth century by the Caroline Divines who continued in the way of Jewel and Hooker by proclaiming in their lives and in their writings the order and the ethos of the Church of England. Their desire, too, was for a true *via media* within the Church of England, a *via media* that would lie between the extremes of Rome, on the one hand, and those of the Calvinists and Lutherans on the other. Perhaps the best definition of the conservative orthodox movement with catholic leanings in the Church of England can be found in a statement attributed to Bishop Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626) that has since become famous for establishing the boundaries of Anglicanism. Andrewes wrote:

One canon reduced to writing by God himself, two testaments, three creeds, four general councils, five centuries, and the series of fathers in that period—the centuries that is, before Constantine, and two after, determine the boundary of our faith.⁸⁵

It was during the seventeenth century, then, in the midst of the conflict in the Church of England created by those whose affinities lay with Rome and those who had proclivities toward Puritanism, that Andrewes, a Caroline Divine, wrote what has become the standard for conservative orthodoxy in Anglicanism. Together with a group of men who were called “Arminian” after a Dutch theologian who had revolted against Calvinism in his own country, Andrewes and others like him⁸⁶ desired a church that would be both catholic and reformed. These men were conscious of the weaknesses in the medieval

⁸⁵ Stephen Sykes, “The Fundamentals of Christianity,” *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty and Jonathan Knight, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988) 267. The quotation is taken from Lancelot Andrewes *Opuscula quaedam Posthuma* (Oxford: Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology, 1852) 91.

⁸⁶ John R. H. Moorman, *A History of the Church in England* 235-236. The Caroline Divines included Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626), father of the movement; George Herbert (1593-1633), poet of the movement; John Cosin (1594-1672), scholar and historian who influenced the *Prayer Book* of 1662; Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667), a scholar who wrote *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying*, practical handbooks for the laity; and Nicholas Ferrar (1593-1637) who founded a Christian community at Little Gidding in Huntingdonshire.

church, and so they looked back to the first five centuries of Christianity, to the Greek fathers, and to the early history of liturgy for their models. The goal of the Caroline Divines was the establishment of a church that had high standards for worship, morality, and the parochial clergy. Because of their sound scholarship, their sanctity of life, and their devotion to their goal, the Caroline Divines laid the foundation of conservative orthodoxy with catholic leanings on which future generations of Anglicans could build.

In the nineteenth century, another impetus to the orthodox conservative strand within Anglicanism came from the Oxford Movement. Like Jewel and Hooker before them, the Tractarians⁸⁷ advocated an approach to the Scriptures using the tradition of the early church as a guide. They envisioned the church as

a living being...and tradition...is more like the beating of the heart or the breathing of the lungs, or the character of the man, which is part hidden, part reflected in his appearance, part issuing in his conduct, part appearing in his words.⁸⁸

With such a reliance on the use of the tradition of the early centuries of the Church to interpret the Scriptures, those associated with the Oxford Movement recognized the difficulties involved in comprehending this vast body of writings. Therefore they believed this task should be delegated to church historians well versed in such matters.

The influence of the conservative orthodox wing of the Anglican Church has always been that of providing a balanced approach, a *via media*, between what is considered catholic and what is reformed or protestant. Following in the way of Richard Hooker, Scriptural interpretation is aided by church tradition and the right use of human

⁸⁷ This name was given to John Henry Newman (1801-1890) and Edward Pusey (1800-1882) because they wrote Tracts for the Times that were the means whereby the tenets of the Oxford Movement were disseminated. "Apostolic Succession," "The Catholic Church," and "Thoughts on Alterations in the Liturgy" were the first three tracts published in 1833.

⁸⁸ Owen Chadwick, ed., The Mind of the Oxford Movement (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1967) 40-41.

reason. In addition, the proponents of conservatism have tended to lean toward Roman liturgical practices at times because they regard these as being integral to the early church which they valued and desired to emulate.

Susan Howatch chose to fashion Charles Ashworth, one of the main characters in the Starbridge series, after a modern representative of the conservative orthodox movement, namely, Austin Farrer. Howatch borrowed quotations from Farrer's published writings to introduce the themes of the chapters in Absolute Truths, the last novel of the series which completes her treatment of the character of Charles Ashworth that she began in the first novel, Glittering Images.

Farrer himself was born in Hampstead, London, England, on October 1, 1904. His father was a Baptist minister and so Farrer was brought up as a Baptist. He attended St. Paul's School, London, (1917-1923) and there he gained a scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford (1923-1927). At Oxford, he obtained a first in Classical Moderations, a first in Greats (Literae Humaniores), and a first in Theology. He was awarded a Craven Scholarship in 1925 and the Liddon Studentship in 1927. It was also at Oxford that Farrer became a member of the Church of England. He was ordained a deacon in 1928 and a priest in 1929. Farrer then served as a curate at all Saints, Dewsbury, West Yorkshire. In 1931 he returned to Oxford where he became chaplain and tutor at St. Edmund Hall from 1931 to 1935. From 1935 until 1960, Farrer was a Fellow and Chaplain of Trinity College, Oxford. Farrer received a Bachelor of Divinity and a Doctor of Divinity on the same day in 1945. In 1959 when the Regius Professorship of Divinity became vacant, Farrer's name was submitted, but he failed to obtain this appointment. Instead, Farrer became the Warden of Keble College in 1960, a post he held until his

untimely death in 1968 due to a coronary thrombosis. He was only sixty-four years of age at the time. Farrer was also a fellow of the British Academy, an honorary fellow of Trinity College, and a member of the Church of England Liturgical Commission.

In 1932, Farrer met Katherine Newton at Rickmansworth where her father, the Reverend F. H. J. Newton, was vicar. Katharine herself was in residence as a student at St. Anne's. Although Farrer and Katharine became fast friends, he did not propose marriage to her until after she had completed her degree. The two were then married on April 15, 1937, and a daughter, whom they named Caroline, was born in 1939.

As Caroline grew it became evident that she had a learning disability, so she was sent to a special school in Kent. The separation as well as the expense incurred by this situation proved to be difficult for her parents, but Caroline achieved success and left the school at age eighteen to take a position in a religious community where she did embroidery. Both Austin and Katharine published various works in order to finance their daughter's education, but the ordeal was a hardship for both of them. Katharine suffered from chronic insomnia which she treated with alcohol and various barbiturates. This led to addiction and many unhappy scenes between husband and wife. The strain had a deleterious effect on Farrer as well for in July, 1967, he collapsed with hypertension at the Community of the Resurrection in Mirfield. Then about a month before he died when Farrer returned home from a visit to Kelham in Nottinghamshire, he was so weak he crawled upstairs on his hands and knees. On the night of his death, he had complained of an upset stomach and gone to bed early. Katharine arose during the night and broke her

arm in a fall. She was taken to Radcliffe Infirmary the next morning, and Farrer died before her return.⁸⁹

Farrer has been described as a private man and a philosopher who had the spirit of a poet. He possessed a deep understanding of human nature which gave him a great capacity for charity toward the individual person.⁹⁰ He was a hard worker who expected much of others and of himself. C. S. Lewis wrote of Farrer that he “writes with authority and therefore has no need to shout.”⁹¹ A. N. Wilson has also described Austin Farrer as the “author of incomparably the most interesting theological books ever to come out of the Oxford Theological Faculty.”⁹² Diogenes Allen has said of Farrer that

Although he mastered several specialized areas, such as New Testament studies, philosophy, and doctrinal theology, and made important contributions at the highest level to each, as a college chaplain he lived a life that was focused on teaching, preaching, celebrating Holy Communion, and attending to people’s pastoral needs.⁹³

Susan Howatch herself characterized Austin Farrer as

a prayer-Book Anglican in the Tractarian tradition...a quintessential Anglican Catholic, although he believed that Protestant and Catholic doctrine were not fundamentally opposed and that each needed the other.⁹⁴

Howatch has further commented on Farrer’s strict orthodox faith in an “age of easy relativism where every belief ... is thought by some to be as valid as any other.”⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Robert Boak Slocum, Light in a Burning Glass: A Systematic Presentation of Austin Farrer’s Theology (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2007) 1-2 provides the biographical data for this summary of Farrer’s life.

⁹⁰ Ibid. page 3 references Francis Douglas Price’s “Speech at Keble London Dinner” (January 7, 1969) 2. Price was sub-warden at Keble College.

⁹¹ Ibid. 3 Slocum quotes C. S. Lewis, Preface, A Faith of Our Own by Austin Farrer (Cleveland World Publishing, 1960) 8. .

⁹² A. N. Wilson, C. S. Lewis: A Biography (New York: Norton, 1990) 245.

⁹³ Diogenes Allen, “Farrer’s Spirituality,” Captured by the Crucified, ed. David Hein and Edward Hugh Henderson (New York: T & T International, 2004) 47.

⁹⁴ Susan Howatch, introduction, Saving Belief by Austin Farrer (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1994) viii.

⁹⁵ Ibid. x.

She even suggests that Farrer would have been more at home with the medieval Scholastics, “devoted as they were to reason and logic and to the inheritance of Aristotle.” Instead, Howatch notes that Farrer published his one systematic treatise on theology (Saving Belief) a year after the publication of John Robinson’s controversial Honest to God.⁹⁶

In the Preface to the first edition of Saving Belief, Austin Farrer asks several salient questions imposed by modernity:

Can reasonable minds still think theologically? How much, if so, of the traditional pattern must they discard? Is theology a science, or can it be made so? And if not, what then?⁹⁷

Having posed these questions, Farrer then draws an analogy with a real life situation, as he is wont to do. Standing on the edge of a pool, he suggests, one cannot know if one remembers how to swim—unless one jumps in. So it is with theology, and so Farrer “jumps in” in Saving Belief to discuss several basic truths of Christianity that are challenged by modernity: Faith and Evidence, Providence and Evil, Creed and History, Sin and Redemption, Law and Spirit, and Heaven and Hell.

With supreme skill, Farrer describes faith as an open accepting attitude; there is a God, a God who is defined as the creator of human existence. Farrer uses many analogies in speaking of what faith in God is. One analogy is that of an orphan who has witnessed what it means to have a mother and then reasons to him/herself that he/she also has or had a mother. Human beings are open to God just as the orphan is open to the fact that he/she, too, has a mother, because we sense that we are created beings. The evidence for God arises in our own experience of being created. Thus we can reason that we have

⁹⁶ Ibid. ix.

⁹⁷ Austin Farrer, Saving Belief (New York: Morehouse-Barlow, 1964) 5.

a creator. According to Farrer, however, knowing that we have this faith in God is not yet a saving belief. Saving belief comes from our desire to give God his due, which is our very life. As Farrer states: “Union of will with God is the subject-matter of revealed religion.”⁹⁸

In Saving Belief, Farrer speaks of Providence in connection with the problem of evil. Although he acknowledges the world-views of pantheistic religions, he always speaks from within a theistic context. From this perspective, Farrer demonstrates that we arrive at a belief in Providence, or God’s omnipotent goodness, from our belief in God’s transcendence. Thus we envision omnipotent goodness radiating on every part of the world from outside it just as the sun’s rays fall on every corner of the globe. However, despite the influence of Providence, everything in the world is given its own freedom to be and act. Why God chose to create a world that has imperfections or “evil” is a moot point since God has chosen to make this world and not another. According to Farrer, this question is meaningless. Although Farrer admits that when a person is suffering, no reasoning about good and evil can bring comfort or consolation, he is adamant when he writes that God’s creative providence is continually acting upon the world for its conservation and for its redemption. In addition, as Christians, we believe in a God who works to bring good out of evil, as he brought resurrection out of death.⁹⁹ In a sermon entitled “The Country Doctor,” Farrer expresses this same idea in these words:

No, God does not give us explanations; we do not comprehend the world, and we are not going to. It is, and it remains for us, a confused mystery of bright and dark. God does not give us explanations; he gives us a Son...a Son is better than an explanation. The explanation of our death leaves us no less dead than we were; but a Son gives us a life,

⁹⁸ Ibid. 32.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 57-58.

in which to live.¹⁰⁰

When Farrer discusses creed and history, he demonstrates in conservative orthodox fashion the centrality of Christ in his thought as the revelation of perfect Godhead and manhood. He reasons that human beings are more perfect in relation with another person than in isolation, and so, although we cannot fathom a God who is at the same time one-in-three persons, we understand that it holds true that this is a better way of existing. Using the analogy of Einstein's theory of relativity (it has always existed, but it needed a superior mind to articulate it) so, too, the way God is as a Trinity has always been but needed the Godhead in Manhood, that is, Jesus Christ, to illustrate in history how God is and has always been. A Christian theologian, then, becomes wise after the event. As Farrer states: "It took the impact of the divine Son incarnate to make us acknowledge the Father and the Son in spiritual relation."¹⁰¹

Farrer not only identifies Jesus Christ as the perfect revelation of God; he locates his actual life at the center of human history "only in the sense that the horizontal movement of human affairs was uniquely touched at that point by a vertical inflow from above."¹⁰² Christians can apprehend this belief because they have the Old Testament which

contains the story of God's secret providence in making the humanity of Christ, in so far as that making worked through the direction of Israel's destinies, the enlightenment of Israel's faith, and the kindling of Israel's hope. This is history of a sort, but not of the common sort. History as commonly understood concerns the acts and thoughts of men, not the half-disclosed purposes of God.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Ausitn Farrer, Said or Sung (London: The Faith Press, 1960) 27-28.

¹⁰¹ Austin Farrer, Saving Belief 67.

¹⁰² Ibid. 69.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 71.

Farrer then proceeds to explain that God works in history through his creatures, as, for instance, Shakespeare expressed his art through a certain medium. Likewise, God used Jesus' manhood as the medium or instrument of redemption. By looking back on the Christ-event, then, the Apostles discerned God acting perfectly as God and Man in Christ. The Gospels contain the account of Christ's life, and although Farrer allows that they also contain some supernatural myth, they still show forth Jesus' human personality, God's redemptive work through Christ, and the hope of resurrection which "enhances, or extends, the action of his [God's] creatures."¹⁰⁴ In one of his sermons, Farrer illustrates again the importance of the Christ-event within his thought. He writes:

In one sense, the difficulty of incarnation is not to be explained away. It is and remains the most stupendous paradox. Infinite God makes a Jewish carpenter, personally identical with himself; Deity lives out the life of a free-lance rabbi. All our religion is concerned with God's condescension to us, his breaking through into our existence. But incarnation is the supreme example of unmerited grace, an intervention of love beyond our wildest hopes, and even beyond the furthestmost reach of our thoughts.¹⁰⁵

When Farrer sets out to define and discuss sin in Saving Belief, he acknowledges that there are some in modern times who doubt its existence and that there are others who claim that sin is a disease curable by psychologists. Speaking as a conservative orthodox theologian, he refutes both of these statements and arrives at a definition of the verb "to sin" which is "to do a wrong thing in relation to some person, including God."¹⁰⁶

Theologians help further clarify the meaning of sin by revealing God's will. As Farrer states: "Between God and sinners there is a real battle of wills."¹⁰⁷ Farrer's treatment of

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 82.

¹⁰⁵ Austin Farrer, "Incarnation," The Brink of Mystery, ed. Charles C. Conti (London: SPCK. 1976) 19.

¹⁰⁶ Austin Farrer, Saving Belief 88.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 97.

sin culminates in his thoughts on redemption which he defines as “the mitigation of the harm we might do ourselves or others, and the bringing of us into reconciliation with God.”¹⁰⁸ He locates the basis of our redemption in the incarnation. Farrer writes:

What, then, did God do for his people’s redemption? He came among them, bringing his kingdom, and he let events take their human course. He set the divine life in human neighborhood. Men discovered it in struggling with it and were captured by it in crucifying it. What could be simpler? And what more divine?¹⁰⁹

After this succinct presentation of our redemption, Farrer then continues to reason theologically about what he calls the “parable about the payment of our penal debt,” or what is known as Anselm’s classical theory of the atonement.¹¹⁰ He concludes that Anselm’s theory is not the “sober and ultimate truth” about our redemption, and yet it is an “admirable parable” to help us understand what redemption means. Furthermore, Farrer reminds us that

In a theological enquiry, we look for theological formulations. But never let us mistake such formulations for God’s revelation. ... We do not read the story of the cross to make theological deductions. We draw out our theology that we may rightly read the story of the cross.¹¹¹

In his views on sin and redemption, and especially in his reliance on Anselm’s theory of atonement, Farrer demonstrates a classic conservative orthodox Christology.

In writing of Law and Spirit, Farrer refers to two valid expressions of our faith, one sacramental and Catholic, or incorporation into the body of Christ, the other Protestant and personal, or reconciliation through Christ’s death. Farrer demonstrates a typical *via media* stance when he writes

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 98.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 99.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 107.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 107.

But so far from there being a natural tension between incorporation and atonement, each needs the other and without the other neither makes sense. Christ did not come to get himself killed...he came to associate his people with divine life, and they killed him for doing this.¹¹²

In his discussion of incorporation and atonement, Farrer asserts that God did not wait for human beings to do his will before acting through his Son to bring them into union with himself. Incorporation and atonement are both accomplished on God's initiative long before human beings will it. All that is required of human beings is open assent to the will of God, assent effected, however, by the obedience to God's will brought about through the indwelling of the Spirit of God made possible by Christ's atoning action. As Farrer states: "'Holy Ghost' means 'divine life bestowed.'"¹¹³ If we human beings are "narrow" vessels of this divine life which is the Holy Ghost, Jesus, being the divine Son, is the "vessel which gives full scope to the Holy Ghost."¹¹⁴ In other words,

Christ is the primary bearer of the Holy Ghost; when he extends the spiritual gift to others he extends his person through them. As all the limbs and other parts animated by your biological life-pattern are your body, so all those inspired with the Spirit are the body of Christ, 'and severally members thereof.'¹¹⁵

Farrer thus accounts for the action of the Spirit in individuals through the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in Christ within the Church.

Farrer undertakes his treatment of heaven and hell in Saving Belief with a fictitious conversation between a young man and his fiancée. He makes an analogy between the man's desire to wed and the ultimate desire for eternal life. He reasons that our desire for heaven, like the man's yearning for married life, arises from our experience of three things: "joys of which we have a foretaste in this life, joys which arise from a

¹¹² Ibid. 113.

¹¹³ Ibid. 120.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 127.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 131. Farrer here quotes 1 Corinthians 12:27.

more perfect relation with God and the children of God, and joys which might be actualized under a variety of conditions.” Farrer concludes that “our belief in heaven is a confidence in the pattern of perfect relations.”¹¹⁶ He further defines heaven in these terms:

Heaven is a sphere of created being, where God bestows his presence ... in three ways: by a more visible providence ... by a more abundant grace...and by an incarnate presence in the glorified man, Jesus Christ.¹¹⁷

He reinforces his belief in heaven by basing it on the promise of immortality we find in ourselves, in the teaching of Christ, in the evidence of the resurrection, in the Christian’s relation to the living Christ, and in the orientation toward grace that God gives us. Most important of all of these is the teaching of Christ which proclaimed the kingdom of God as a world to come, “a future transformed by some divine mysterious change.”¹¹⁸

In discussing the existence of hell, Farrer stresses that Christians do profess a belief in God and resurrection to eternal life, but that there is no expressed belief in the creeds about the devil or hell. According to the theory of retributive justice, however, we can understand the truth of Christ’s teaching of the flame of everlasting torment. In the end Farrer claims that “the fate of ultimate impenitence is a mystery;” he prefers instead the doctrine of purgatory, rejected by the Reformers, as a remedial fire where in the end we may be assured of God’s mercy.¹¹⁹

This survey of Austin Farrer’s thought has been limited mostly to his systematic presentation in Saving Belief because it represents most fully his writings as a

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 141.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 145-146.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 149-150.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 154-155.

conservative orthodox thinker within Anglicanism. Here one finds a catholic

Christology, as expressed in Lecture III of the Bampton series:

The Person of Christ...is...the height of supernaturality: for in it the first and second causes are personally united, the finite and infinite centres in some manner coincide; manhood is so taken into God, that the human life of Jesus is exercised from the centre of deity, so far as a human life on earth can be, without ceasing to be a human life on earth...¹²⁰

Here, too, one sees the reasonable position of the orthodox conservative thinker poised as he is wont to be in the *via media* between Roman Catholicism and reformed Protestantism. We also note the reliance on Scripture and tradition approached with the best methods of human reason as the formative bases of Austin Farrer's thought.

It is this stance that Susan Howatch bestows on Charles Ashworth in the Starbridge series. The very fact that in Glittering Images, the first of the Starbridge novels, he is a professor of early Church history at Cambridge places him professionally in an appropriate position to be a champion of Anglican conservative orthodoxy. It is natural, then, for him to go to Starbridge to investigate the controversial Bishop Jardine on the pretext of writing an article reappraising St. Anselm's ontological argument for the existence of God.¹²¹ Speaking from a liberal perspective, Bishop Jardine hears of Charles's impending visit to the bishop's palace and he recognizes him as being someone "who thinks the world began not with Adam and Eve but with the Council of Nicaea."¹²² Later, Charles even classifies himself as a "conservative bishop, underlining the importance of preserving the accumulated wisdom of the past" when he recalls that he

¹²⁰ Austin Farrer, The Glass of Vision (London: Dacre Press, 1948) 39.

¹²¹ Susan Howatch, Glittering Images (New York: Fawcett Press, 1987) 9. Archbishop Lang's suggestion that Ashworth go to Starbridge under these pretenses is completely in character for an orthodox don.

¹²² Susan Howatch, Glittering Images 18.

wrote a rebuttal entitled A Modern Heresy for Modern Man in response to John A. T. Robinson's controversial Honest to God.¹²³ In Scandalous Risks when Ashworth is dictating his thoughts that refute Robinson's *Situationethik*, he maintains the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church by claiming that there are some actions that are "intrinsically wrong and can never under any circumstances be justified."¹²⁴ These are just a few of the instances where the conservative orthodox stance in Anglicanism is upheld in the character of Charles Ashworth.

Chapter Two has presented the Anglican theologians whose ideas inform those of the three main characters of the Starbridge series. Chapter Three will now turn to a discussion of Bernard Lonergan's theory of conversion before discussing its application to the lives of the three main characters in Chapter Four.

¹²³Susan Howatch, Absolute Truths (New York: Fawcett Press, 1994) 5.

¹²⁴Susan Howatch, Scandalous Risks (New York: Fawcett Press, 1990) 413.

Chapter 3

Anglicanism Encounters Bernard Lonergan

3.1. Introduction

Bernard Lonergan was one of the most formidable Roman Catholic theologians of the twentieth century, yet his greatest achievement was not so much articulating a particular theology as proposing a theological method. Furthermore, in his Method in Theology, Lonergan “maintained that the foundational reality of theology is the theologian’s intellectual, moral, and religious conversion.”¹ First, this chapter will present a detailed analysis of Lonergan’s Method, demonstrating especially what is meant by intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. Then Lonergan’s theological method will be related to the three theological stances of the theologians discussed in Chapter Two in order that affinities with and divergences from this method may be shown and analyzed. Lastly, a comparison of the application of Lonergan’s theory of conversion within both a Roman Catholic and an Anglican perspective will be made. These points

¹ Warren Harrington, “Conversion as Foundation of Theology: An Interpretation of Bernard Lonergan’s Position,” diss., Fordham U., 1980, 2.

will serve as a prelude to the main topic of this dissertation which will be discussed in Chapter Four, the application of Bernard Lonergan's theory of conversion to the three main characters in Susan Howatch's novels of the Starbridge series.

3.2. Bernard Lonergan's Theory of Conversion in Method in Theology

It must be clear at the outset of this discussion that, for Lonergan, theology is not knowledge about God, it is knowledge of God. As Harrington states: "For Lonergan, theology is the groping, inquiring and affirming, the hypothesizing and testing whose intention is to speak of God."² This view of theology and the contemporary context of his work that recognizes the rise of historical mindedness, that acknowledges the existence of cultural pluralism, and that values the sensitivity to subjectivity both contribute to Lonergan's insistence that the converted subject is the foundational reality which attempts to reach the goal of knowledge of God.³ Each subject achieves this goal by engaging in one or more of eight interlocking specialties or theological tasks defined by Lonergan which are all ordered toward achieving knowledge of God.⁴

In saying that the foundation of theology is the intellectually, morally and religiously converted person, Lonergan does not focus on the propositions of revelation, on the inspiration of Holy Scripture or on the authority of the Church. Rather, it is the individual influenced by grace who experiences the reality expressed in these and can accept and affirm their truth, who is the starting point of any theological method. Simply stated, the intellectually converted person is one who turns from appearances to grasp the

² Ibid. 4.

³ Ibid. 3.

⁴ This statement does not intend in any way to deny the necessity of grace in the process of conversion. See pages 120-122 of this chapter for further explication on the role of grace in conversion.

reality of a situation. A morally converted person is one who turns from the pursuit of mere satisfaction to the pursuit of value, or the truly good. A religiously converted person is one who turns from all else to God. Conversely, the absence of a religious conversion precludes the experience of God; the absence of a moral conversion precludes the attainment of value; and the absence of an intellectual conversion precludes the understanding of reality and hence, the goal of theology, knowledge of God, remains beyond one's grasp.

Before articulating a method in theology, Lonergan defines method in the natural sciences as “a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results.”⁵ Each of the operations (which include seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, inquiring, imagining, understanding, conceiving, formulating, reflecting, marshalling and weighing the evidence, judging, deliberating, evaluating, deciding, speaking, and writing) possesses an object that receives the action and a subject that exerts itself in performing the operation. Through a process of what Lonergan calls introspection, the subject objectifies his/her experience and becomes aware of his/her role.

Lonergan's concentration on the subject occurs in much of his writing. In a lecture delivered in 1968, he reflects on how philosophers and theologians prior to Hegel (for instance, he names Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Buber, and even Kant) neglected the subject because of three reasons. The first reason is the insistence on the objectivity of truth. Lonergan states that ontologically, truth resides only in the subject.

⁵ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971) 5.

Thus he writes: “The fruit of truth must grow and mature on the tree of the subject, before it can be plucked and placed in its absolute realm.”⁶ He explains further that

If one recalls that truth exists formally only in judgments and that judgments exist only in the mind, then the fallacy [of the objectivity of truth] is easily pinned down. What God reveals is a truth in the mind of God and in the mind of believers, but it is not a truth in the minds of nonbelievers; and to conclude that the mysteries of faith are truths in the mind of God or in the minds of believers in no way suggests that the mysteries are demonstrable.⁷

According to Lonergan, philosophers and theologians in the past have forgotten that truth exists in the minds of subjects first of all.

A second reason for the neglect of the subject, according to Lonergan, was the rationalistic notion of pure reason which he claims may be found in the Aristotelian notion of science. He explains what he means by this in these terms:

When scientific and philosophic conclusions follow necessarily from premises that are self-evident, then the road to science and philosophy is not straight and narrow but broad and easy. There is no need to be concerned with the subject. No matter who he is, no matter what his interests, almost no matter how cursory his attention, he can hardly fail to grasp what is self-evident and, having grasped it, he can hardly fail to draw conclusions that are necessary. If one happens to have opinions, one will have to defend them as self-evident or demonstrable. If one begins to doubt, one is likely to end up a complete skeptic. There is no need for concern with the subject, for the maieutic art of a Socrates, for intellectual conversion, for open-mindedness, striving, humility, perseverance.⁸

One can easily see in this explication that operating from first principles that are held to be self-evident would tend to negate the importance of the individual subject.

A third reason for the neglect of subjectivity has been the metaphysical account of the soul. Lonergan depicts the difference between the soul and the subject in this way:

⁶ Bernard Lonergan, *A Second Collection* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 71.

⁷ Ibid. 71.

⁸ Ibid. 72.

As plants and animals, so men [and women] have souls. As in plants and animals, so in men [and women] the soul is the first act of an organic body. ...We have souls whether we are awake or asleep, saints or sinners, geniuses or imbeciles.

The study of the subject is quite different, for it is the study of oneself inasmuch as one is conscious...It prescind from the soul, its essence, its potencies, its habits, for none of these is given in consciousness. It attends to operations and to their centre and source which is the self.

Subject and soul, then, are two quite different topics. To know one does not exclude the other in any way. But it very easily happens that the study of the soul leaves one with the feeling that one has no need to study the subject and, to that extent, leads to a neglect of the subject.⁹

The soul, then, is thought to be a component of all organic living beings. The subject, on the other hand, is the conscious discerning, inquiring, rationally reflecting, deliberating, and thus necessarily human being. Because the subject has been overlooked and misunderstood until recent times, Lonergan would have us take the subject into account.

When Lonergan poses the converted subject as the foundation of theology, he recognizes that this subject does not function in isolation but as part of a historical and cultural whole. In other words, there is a connection between subjectivity and human historicity. Thus he states:

The many expressions of individual living are linked together by an intelligible web. To reach that intelligible connectedness is not just a matter of assembling all the expressions of a lifetime. Rather, there is a developing whole that is present in the parts, articulating under each new set of circumstances the values it pursues, and thereby achieving its own individuality and distinctiveness. Just as human consciousness is not confined to the moment but rises on cumulative memories and proceeds in accord with preference schedules towards its hierarchy of goals, so too its expressions not only together but even singly have the capacity to reveal the direction and momentum of a life.

As there is intelligibility in the life of the individual, so too there is intelligibility in the common meanings, common values, common purposes, common and complementary activities of groups.¹⁰

Not only does Lonergan demonstrate the connection between subjectivity and historicity

⁹ Ibid. 72-73.

¹⁰ Lonergan, Method in Theology 211.

here, he also indicates a shift from a deductive to an empirical approach. We no longer understand ourselves according to *a priori* principles about human nature; rather, we see ourselves in terms of a developing history.

At another point in his writings, Lonergan describes our modern mentality that is very aware of its creative subjectivity in all areas of human endeavor. He states:

Modern man [and woman] is fully aware that he [she] has made his [her] world. There are modern languages, consciously developed by turning away from the Latin and Greek languages and literature. There are modern mathematics and modern science, and they differ not only in intent but also in their fundamental conceptions from the Greek achievement...In every case, modernity means the desertion, if not the repudiation, of the old models and methods, and the exercise of freedom, initiative and creativity.¹¹

As modern people, according to Lonergan, we are acutely aware of our subjective contribution to history, whether it is for gain or loss.

Just as history is a dynamic process, so is culture. Formerly culture was conceived as being single and normative, as being “a matter of good manners and good taste, of grace and style, of virtue and character, of models and ideals, of eternal verities and inviolable laws.”¹² In modern times culture is assumed to be very different.

Lonergan writes of culture in these terms:

But the modern notion of culture is not normative but empirical. Culture is a general notion. It denotes something found in every people, for in every people there is some apprehension of meaning and value in their way of life. So it is that modern culture is the culture that knows about other cultures, that relates them to one another genetically, that knows all of them to be man-made.¹³

Because of Lonergan’s appreciation for the historical and the cultural context of theology, he has called for a new foundation for theological method, namely, the

¹¹ Lonergan, A Second Collection 4-5.

¹² Ibid. 92.

¹³ Ibid. 92.

individual theologian's personal conversion. It is through intellectual conversion that the subject comes to know him or herself as a knowing subject; through moral conversion that the subject evaluates him or herself as an evaluating subject; and through religious conversion that the subject comes to the realization that he or she is a lover of God who was and is and shall be first loved by God.

Although the foundation of Lonergan's theological method is the individual theologian's personal conversion, he underpins the entire process with a set of related and recurrent operations cumulatively advancing towards an ideal goal which has already been stated as the knowledge of God. To these operations Lonergan gives the name functional specialties. These are distinguished from field specializations and subject specializations which Lonergan describes in this way:

Thus, where field specialization would divide the Old Testament into the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, subject specialization would distinguish Semitic languages, Hebrew history, the religions of the ancient Near East, and Christian theology.¹⁴

According to this definition, another example of field specialization would be patristic theology and medieval theology whereas subject specialization would include Christology and ecclesiology.¹⁵ In other words, field specializations refer to different component parts within one general topic whereas subject specializations distinguish different topics that are related to one another.

Functional specialization, on the other hand, "distinguishes and separates successive stages in the process from data to results."¹⁶ Lonergan describes eight

¹⁴ Lonergan, Method in Theology 126.

¹⁵ Warren Harrington, "Conversion as Foundation of Theology: An Interpretation of Bernard Lonergan's Position" 28.

¹⁶ Lonergan, Method in Theology 126.

functional specialties in theology: (1) research, (2) interpretation, (3) history, (4) dialectic, (5) foundations, (6) doctrines, (7) systematics, and (8) communications. Every theologian is not involved in all of these specialties, but he/she may work within one or several of them. Research makes available the data relevant to theological investigation. Then interpretation seeks to understand what is meant in the data. History describes the geographical distribution, the temporal succession, and the social characteristics of the data under investigation. Dialectic has to do with the concrete, the dynamic, and the contradictory, especially with regard to the history of Christian movements. As such, dialectic aims at a comprehensive view of the data derived from the analysis of conflicting and converging phenomena. Foundations presents the horizon within which the meaning of doctrines can be apprehended. Doctrines expresses judgments of fact and judgments of value. Facts and values give rise to further questions which systematics attempts to answer. Communications is concerned with theology in its external relations with interdisciplinary fields of human endeavor and with different people of diverse cultures using the varied media available at any given time and place.¹⁷

It is important to realize that Lonergan distinguishes two major phases in theology, one which looks to the past and one which looks to the future. The first four functional specializations--research, interpretation, history, and dialectic--deal with the past; foundations, doctrines, systematics and communications are geared toward the future. Both phases are performed by persons operating on four levels of conscious and intentional operations: the level of experience, the level of understanding, the level of judgment, and the level of existential decision. Lonergan explains the correspondence

¹⁷ Ibid. 127-132.

between these four levels of conscious operations and the first four functional specializations in these terms:

So the proper achievement and end of the first level, experiencing, is the apprehension of data; that of the second level, understanding, is insight into the apprehended data; that of the third level, judgment, is the acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses and theories put forward by understanding to account for that data; that of the fourth level, decision, the acknowledgment of values and the selection of the methods or other means that lead to their realization.¹⁸

The last four functional specialties, however, correspond to the four levels of conscious operations in inverse order. As Lonergan explains:

Like dialectic, foundations is on the level of decision. Like history, doctrines is on the level of judgment. Like interpretation, systematics aims at understanding. Finally, as research tabulates the data from the past, so communications produces data in the present and for the future.¹⁹

Further explication of the functional specialties now will help to make their meaning more precise. Beginning with research and the decision about which areas are relevant for investigation, Lonergan is very clear. “My answer is to let Christian theologians begin from where they already stand. Each will consider one or more areas relevant to theological research.”²⁰ Lonergan recognizes that theologians may disagree on the areas relevant for theological research for a variety of reasons. For example, theologians of different cultures or differentiations in consciousness²¹ or whether a person has experienced intellectual, moral, or religious conversion will influence the areas chosen for research. However, Lonergan believes that the method itself will eventually take care of the matter. Further research, interpretation, history or even

¹⁸ Ibid. 133.

¹⁹ Ibid. 135.

²⁰ Ibid. 150.

²¹ Ibid, 272. Lonergan maintains that there are four basic realms of meaning: the realm of common sense, the realm of theory, the realm of interiority, and the realm of transcendence. Undifferentiated consciousness operates only in the realm of common sense, while differentiated consciousness operates in the realm of common sense and in one or more other realms.

dialectic will resolve the questions posed initially by research or the theologian may be moved to change his practice in research as a result of the interaction among the various specialties.²²

Next, the interpreter engages in the operation of uncovering the meaning of the data presented by the researcher. When dealing with a particular writing, for instance, it is the task of the interpreter to tease out the meaning of a text's creator, in other words, to exegete a text. According to Lonergan, this involves three conscious operations: understanding the text, judging how correct one's understanding of the text is, and stating what one judges to be the correct understanding of the text.²³ The interpreter must know more than simply the words used in the text; he/she must have an understanding of the subject matter and know something about the author of the text as well.

While the interpreter is concerned with understanding past expressions of meaning within a narrow range, the historian seeks a broader picture. According to Lonergan, the theological historian treats "the doctrinal history of Christian theology with its antecedents and consequents in the cultural and institutional histories of the Christian religion and the Christian churches and sects."²⁴ While the interpreter's task is to understand what was meant, the historian must judge what happened and determine the meaning of events. Because historians come from different backgrounds, history will be written from many different perspectives. As Lonergan explains:

Some may take for granted what others labor to prove. Discoveries can be equivalent, yet approached from different sets of previous questions, expressed in different terms, and so leading to different sequences of further questions. Even where results are much the same, still the reports will be written for different

²² Ibid. 150-151.

²³ Ibid. 155.

²⁴ Ibid. 128.

readers, and each historian has to devote special attention to what his readers would easily overlook or misesteem.²⁵

This describes what Lonergan calls perspectivism. Because historians are finite beings dealing with incomplete information derived by them, history will represent different standpoints. These are different versions of history, in a sense, which do not contradict each other but are merely incomplete portrayals of a very complex subject. Furthermore, perspectivism means in the end that the historian reveals not only something of the past but also something of his or her present humanity.²⁶ Thus, Lonergan concedes:

We must be content to allow historians to be educated, acculturated, historical beings, even though this will involve them in some error. We must allow them to write their histories in the light of all they happen to know or think they know and of all they inadvertently take for granted: they cannot do otherwise and a pluralist society lets them do what they can.²⁷

In the end, according to Lonergan, the functional specialties of dialectic and foundations will resolve the problems of incompatible histories and also correct any errors of the finite historian.²⁸

The functional specialties of research, interpretation, and history are all distinguished by a subjective operation. At the same time, the cognitional operations of experiencing, understanding, and judging are foremost within each respectively.

However, according to Lonergan, the fourth functional specialty, dialectic, is performed at a deeper level of human consciousness. It is concerned with values. Therefore, the dialectician deals mainly with conflicts. Thus Lonergan explains

The materials of dialectic, then, are primarily the conflicts centering in Christian movements. But to these must be added the secondary conflicts in historical accounts and theological interpretations of movements.

²⁵ Ibid. 217.

²⁶ Ibid. 218-220.

²⁷ Ibid. 223-224.

²⁸ Ibid. 224.

Besides the materials of dialectic there is its aim. This is high and distant. As empirical science aims at a complete explanation of all phenomena, so dialectic aims at a comprehensive viewpoint. It seeks some single base or some set of related bases from which it can proceed to an understanding of the character, the oppositions and the relations of the many viewpoints exhibited in conflicting Christian movements, their conflicting histories and their conflicting interpretations.²⁹

Dialectic has as its goal the resolution of conflicts through productive dialogue conducted in an ecumenical spirit.

As mentioned already, the four functional specialties which Lonergan calls research, interpretation, history, and dialectic are all involved with mediating the past into the present. Lonergan insists that they be conducted by a specialist in each field, although it is possible and even advisable that one person conduct the work in each of the four specialties.³⁰ When he writes of the resolution of the conflicts involved in dialectic, however, he refers to the personal stance of the dialectician. Ideally, the person involved in dialectic should have experienced conversion. Lonergan clarifies his delineation of the first four functional specializations in this way:

This fourfold specialization corresponds to the four dimensions of the Christian message and the Christian tradition. For that message and tradition, first of all, are a range of data. Secondly, the data purport to convey not the phenomena of things, as in the natural sciences, but the meanings entertained and communicated by minds, as in the human sciences. Thirdly, these meanings were uttered at given times and places and transmitted through determinate channels and under sundry vicissitudes. Fourthly, the utterance and the transmission were the work of persons bearing witness to Christ Jesus and, by their words and deeds, bringing about the present religious situation.

Research, then, interpretation, history and dialectic reveal the religious situation. They mediate an encounter with persons witnessing to Christ. They challenge to a decision: in what manner or measure am I to carry the burden of continuity or to risk the initiative of change?³¹

²⁹ Ibid. 129.

³⁰ Ibid. 141-142. Lonergan does acknowledge that the more the specialties develop, the more difficult it will be for a single specialist to master all four specialties.

³¹ Ibid. 135.

According to Lonergan, such a question can only be answered by a theologian who is intellectually, morally, and religiously converted.

At this point in our discussion of Lonergan's theological method, it is appropriate to turn to his definition of conversion. By conversion Lonergan means a "transformation of the subject and his world."³² It may be a long process, but it is concentrated in a few momentous judgments and decisions. Conversion results in a change of course and direction. "It is as if one's eyes were opened and one's former world faded and fell away."³³ Lonergan continues:

Conversion is existential, intensely personal, utterly intimate. But it is not so private as to be solitary. It can happen to many, and they can form a community to sustain one another in their self-transformation...Conversion affects all of a man's conscious and intentional operations. It directs his gaze, pervades his imagination, releases the symbols that penetrate to the depths of his psyche. It enriches his understanding, guides his judgments, reinforces his decisions.³⁴

As such, conversion necessitates reflection that explores its origins, developments, purposes, achievements, and failures. This makes conversion thematic and objectified and may lead an individual theologian into the fifth functional specialty, foundations.

As also stated above, the next four functional specialties, namely, foundations, doctrines, systematics, and communications mediate theology into the future. Lonergan writes: "Inasmuch as conversion itself is made thematic and explicitly objectified, there emerges the fifth functional specialty, foundations."³⁵ Foundations as a functional specialty within Lonergan's method does not present doctrines as in fundamental theology; instead it presents the horizon within which doctrines can be understood.

³² Ibid. 130.

³³ Ibid. 130.

³⁴ Ibid. 130-131.

³⁵ Ibid. 131.

Foundations, therefore, both elucidates the conflicts present in dialectic and offers a guide to the specialties of doctrines, systematics, and communications.³⁶

The functional specialty doctrines, on the other hand, occurs within the horizon of foundations. They receive their meaning from dialectic, their clarity from history and their bases in theological research.³⁷ As Lonergan states, doctrines

express judgments of fact and judgments of value. They are concerned, then, with the affirmations and negations not only of dogmatic theology but also of moral, ascetical, mystical, pastoral, and any similar branch.³⁸

Of necessity, because of the different ways of expressing doctrines, questions will be raised that beg for answers from systematics. Lonergan compares the functional specialties of doctrines and systematics in these terms:

Doctrines aims at a clear and distinct affirmation of religious realities: its principal concern is the truth of such an affirmation; its concern to understand is limited to the clarity and distinctness of its affirmation. On the other hand, systematics aims at an understanding of the religious realities affirmed by doctrines. It wants its understanding to be true, for it is not a pursuit of misunderstanding. At the same time, it is fully aware that its understanding is bound to be imperfect, merely analogous, commonly no more than probable.³⁹

In other words, doctrines attempts to state clearly the beliefs of the Christian community while systematics tries to express an understanding of these beliefs.

The last functional specialty, communications, must seek to connect the Christian faith with other disciplines and even with other religions; it must retain its integrity while endeavoring to speak to people of different cultures and diverse strata of society.

³⁶ Ibid. 132.

³⁷ Ibid. 132.

³⁸ Ibid. 132.

³⁹ Ibid 349.

Moreover, it must make the best use of all the various media available at any moment in the history of humankind.⁴⁰

This brief presentation has attempted to show Lonergan's eight functional specialties in his method in theology. As he states:

Such, then is in outline the dynamic unity of theology. It is a unity of interdependent parts, each adjusting to changes in the others, and the whole developing as a result of such changes and adjustments. Further, this internal process and interaction has its internal relations. For theology as a whole functions within the larger context of Christian living within the still larger process of human history.⁴¹

Furthermore, the centrality of the individual theologian is paramount in Lonergan's method because it is the individual theologian who engages in the different levels of cognitive operations, namely, experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding. In addition, Lonergan insists that "foundational reality, as distinct from its expression, is conversion: religious, moral, and intellectual."⁴² One must also note that within the eight functional specialties, if a single theologian is engaged in them, conversion may or may not occur at the turning point between the first four specialties and the last four. While the conversion of the theologian is desirable in the first four specialties, Lonergan maintains that it is indispensable in the last four.

It must be stressed that for Lonergan, "conversion may be intellectual, moral or religious" and that while each is connected to the other two, each is a separate type of

⁴⁰ Ibid. 132-133.

⁴¹ Ibid. 144.

⁴² Ibid. 267.

event that must be considered in itself.⁴³ Through intellectual conversion a person becomes aware that the world mediated by meaning is more than what one merely observes. Thus, for the intellectually converted person knowing is not just seeing but experiencing, understanding, judging, and believing. It is a means of self-transcendence and a way of recognizing that one is a knower. Furthermore, the world mediated by meaning is a world “known not simply through the sense experience of an individual but by the external and internal experience of a cultural community, and by the continuously checked and rechecked judgments of the community.”⁴⁴ Knowledge of God is based on religious experience correctly understood, judged, and believed not only by the individual theologian but by the functional specialists engaged in the entire theological enterprise. Intellectual conversion, moreover, aids cooperation among the various specialists in research, interpretation, and history, while those engaged in articulating doctrine, the product of questions asked and answered at specific times and places, are prompted to ask further questions, thus giving rise to systematics.

Moral conversion, on the other hand, changes the criterion of one’s decisions from personal satisfactions to values.⁴⁵ Satisfactions are purely subjective while value transcends subjectivity. Satisfactions are agreeable to or for someone while the valuable is important in itself. Furthermore, the criterion of value promotes self-transcendence while that of satisfaction does not. Feeling may lead to an apprehension of value, but a

⁴³ Ibid. 238. At another point, Lonergan states: “Though religious conversion sublates moral, and moral conversion sublates intellectual, one is not to infer that intellectual comes first and then moral and finally religious. On the contrary, from a causal viewpoint, one would say that first there is God’s gift of his love. Next, the eye of this love reveals values in their splendor, while the strength of this love brings about their realization, and that is moral conversion. Finally, among the values discerned by the eye of love is the value of believing the truths taught by the religious tradition, and in such tradition and belief are the seeds of intellectual conversion.” Ibid 243.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 240.

matter of judgment of value comes by way of testing and affirmation. Lonergan states further:

In judgments of value, then, three components unite. First, there is knowledge of reality and especially of human reality. Secondly, there are intentional responses to values. Thirdly, there is the initial thrust towards moral self-transcendence constituted by the judgment of value itself.⁴⁶

Correct value judgments lead to good decisions which, in turn, answer the questions:

“What is to be done?” and “Is it to be done, or not?” A decision answers the second question affirmatively and effects action. However, Lonergan is not so naïve as to think that a decision to do something of value means that it will be done. As he states:

Deciding is one thing, doing is another. One has yet to uncover and root out one’s individual, group, and general bias. One has to keep developing one’s knowledge of human reality and potentiality as they are in the existing situation. One has to keep distinct its elements of progress and its elements of decline. One has to keep scrutinizing one’s intentional responses to values and their implicit scales of preference. One has to listen to criticism and to protest. One has to remain ready to learn from others.⁴⁷

In other words, moral perfection cannot be assumed simply because a person is converted. Still, the morally converted person intends to do what is of value and leans in that direction.

According to Lonergan, intellectual conversion and moral conversion are necessary but not sufficient for theology as knowledge of God.⁴⁸ In order for the theological enterprise to reach its goal, Lonergan poses religious conversion as the experience of being in love with God. The word to be underlined here is *experience*, for Lonergan is consistent in maintaining a turn to the subject by grounding religious

⁴⁶ Ibid. 38.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 240.

⁴⁸ See Note 43, page 119 for clarification of the normal causal progression, according to Lonergan, from religious conversion to moral conversion, with intellectual conversion coming as the fruit of both of these.

conversion in the experience of the theologian. Simply stated, religious conversion is the divine initiative in loving us and our response in love to that initiative. As Lonergan states:

Religious conversion is being grasped by ultimate concern. It is other-worldly falling in love. It is total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations. But it is such a surrender, not as an act, but as a dynamic state that is prior to and principle of subsequent acts. It is revealed in retrospect as an under-tow of existential consciousness, as a fated acceptance of a vocation to holiness, as perhaps an increasing simplicity and passivity in prayer. It is interpreted differently in the context of different religious traditions. For Christians it is God's love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us.⁴⁹

What Lonergan is describing here is the gift of grace. As he states: "Operative grace is religious conversion. Cooperative grace is the effectiveness of conversion, the gradual movement towards a full and complete transformation of the whole of one's living and feeling, one's thoughts, words, deeds, and omissions."⁵⁰

Lonergan also contends that all three--intellectual, moral, and religious conversion--are modalities of self-transcendence. As he states, "intellectual conversion is to truth attained by cognitional self-transcendence; moral conversion is to values apprehended, affirmed and realized by a real self-transcendence; religious conversion is to a total being-in-love as the efficacious ground of all self-transcendence, whether in the pursuit of truth, or in the realization of human values, or in the orientation man adopts to the universe, its ground, and its goal."⁵¹ At another point, Lonergan characterizes religious conversion using St. Paul's terminology in Galatians 5:22:

⁴⁹ Ibid. 240-241.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 241.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Though not a product of our knowing and choosing, it [religious conversion] is a conscious dynamic state of love, joy, peace, that manifests itself in acts of kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control.⁵²

By stating that religious conversion is not of our choosing, Lonergan admits that it is a gift of grace. Furthermore, if we adopt St. Paul's language, we can say that a person who is in this dynamic state of love would most likely be a kind, good, gentle person who also exhibits self-control.

Nor does Lonergan ignore the fact that intellectual, moral, and religious conversion can be fraught with "breakdowns," or lapses in their forward movement. As he states:

Besides conversions there are breakdowns. What has been built up so slowly and so laboriously by the individual, the society, the culture, can collapse. Cognitional self-transcendence is neither an easy notion to grasp nor a readily accessible datum of consciousness to be verified. Values have a certain esoteric imperiousness, but can they keep outweighing carnal pleasure, wealth, power? Religion undoubtedly had its day, but is not that day over? Is it not illusory comfort for weaker souls, an opium distributed by the rich to quiet the poor, a mythical projection of man's own excellence into the sky?⁵³

Thus Lonergan does not ignore the fact that sin can and does impede the process of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion both in the individual, in society, and in culture.

This brief analysis of Lonergan's theological method and the significance of conversion within it serves as preparation for the discussions that follow, the relevance of his thought within a mystical, a modern liberal, and a conservative orthodox stance.

⁵² Ibid. 106.

⁵³ Ibid. 243.

3.3. Relevance of Lonergan's Theory within a Mystical Perspective

In his article entitled "Bernard Lonergan and Mysticism,"⁵⁴ Gordon Rixon admits that it is a difficult task to assess the influence of mysticism on the evolution of Lonergan's thought. However, encountering such existential topics as feelings, faith, and religious conversion in Method in Theology compels one to examine this work especially for ideas that have a mystical bent. Furthermore, Rixon is correct when he says:

For Lonergan, metaphysics refers to the content of what is known through subsequent acts of intelligence and critical reflection. Lonergan's approach recognizes the possibility of conversion as an existential change in the subject which is neither reducible to information nor follows from knowledge and thus is distinct from the thematization of an implicit condition of possibility. Religious conversion remains the unconditional response of a particular person to the mystical experience of God's love flooding his or her heart.⁵⁵

To understand the importance of this last statement, a review of the basic assumptions of Lonergan's transcendental method is necessary. According to him, the human subject is self-transcendent intellectually by the achievement of knowledge of reality; he/she is self-transcendent morally by seeking what is worthwhile; and lastly, a person is self-transcendent affectively when he/she falls in love. Yet three kinds of love must also be distinguished: the love of intimacy, the love of humankind, and the love that is other-worldly because it has no conditions, qualifications, restrictions or reservations. It is this last kind of love that exists as a dynamic state and that Lonergan calls sanctifying grace. He characterizes the existence of this other-worldly love in these words:

Traditionally that dynamic state is manifested in three ways: the purgative way in which one withdraws from sinning and overcomes temptation; the illuminative way in which one's discernment of values is refined and one's commitment to them is strengthened; the unitive way in which the serenity of joy and peace

⁵⁴ Gordon Rixon S.J., "Bernard Lonergan and Mysticism," Theological Studies 62 (2001) : 479-497.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 495.

reveal the love that hitherto had been struggling against sin and advancing in virtue.⁵⁶

At the heart of Lonergan's method in theology, then, lie the three basic steps of classical mysticism, namely purgation, illumination, and union with God that take place in the individual subject.

Raymond Moloney also insists that Lonergan is concerned with spirituality not only as an academic study, but also as a "lived reality in a person."⁵⁷ This comes as no surprise since conversion is central to Lonergan's entire theological task. Moloney points out that the subject of spirituality emerges in Lonergan's discussion of "the differentiation of consciousness."⁵⁸ Summarizing Lonergan's position, Moloney writes:

For a fully integrated notion of theology...there is need of a fivefold differentiation of consciousness: common sense, science, scholarship, intentionality analysis, and, last but not least, the life of prayer. Again he says elsewhere that the spiritual life, by which he means prayer and self-denial, is "the fundamental mover."⁵⁹

Moloney further believes that Lonergan's main contribution to the discussion of spirituality lies in his holistic concept of the human person. Spirituality, according to Lonergan, is "the transformation of consciousness that makes possible a human life that is a life of prayer." Consciousness is a central concept in Lonergan's whole system. It occurs on four levels of human activity--experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding--which all come together in a single unity. As Moloney states, spirituality happens on all four of these levels of consciousness and in the "polyphony" of these levels.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Lonergan, Method in Theology 289.

⁵⁷ Raymond Moloney, S.J., "The Person as Subject of Spirituality in the Writings of Bernard Lonergan," Milltown Studies 45 (2000) : 66-80.

⁵⁸ Lonergan, Method in Theology 81-85; 271-276.

⁵⁹ Raymond Moloney, S.J., "The Person as Subject of Spirituality in the Writings of Bernard Lonergan" 67.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 67-68.

When one considers the writings of William Ralph Inge, the proponent of classical mysticism discussed in Chapter Two, in the context of Bernard Lonergan's thought, several similarities can be discerned. First of all, Inge believes that knowledge of God comes from personal mystical experience. This parallels Lonergan's belief that theology is knowledge of God not simply knowledge about God. It also resonates with Lonergan's establishing the foundational reality of theology as the individual theologian who has experienced conversion. Secondly, Lonergan defines the signs of the dynamic state of being in love with God, or religious conversion, as the three steps of mysticism, namely, the purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive life. Inge also speaks of these stages as the formative life of the mystic. The purgative stage is characterized by self-discipline; the illuminative, by a concentration of the intellect and will upon God; and the unitive or contemplative life, by an experience of union with God.⁶¹ Thirdly, and most important, Inge's entire presentation of mysticism is couched in history, one of the eight functional specialties of Bernard Lonergan's Method in Theology. It is to an evaluation of Inge's historical presentation in Christian Mysticism in terms of Lonergan's functional specialty history that this discussion will now turn.

First of all, Lonergan maintains that the historian need not be concerned with philosophy except when it is understood as "the set of real conditions of the possibility of historical inquiry." These real conditions are "the human race, remains and traces from its past, the community of historians with their traditions and instruments, and their conscious and intentional operations."⁶² Inge demonstrates an awareness of philosophy

⁶¹ William Ralph Inge, Christian Mysticism (New York: Living Age Books, 1956) 11-12.

⁶² Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 225.

in this “restricted” sense, as Lonergan calls it,⁶³ because as he writes his history of Christian mysticism, he works within this set of real conditions appropriate to the historian. Secondly, Lonergan states that the historian must employ analogy in speaking from the present to the past, being cognizant of the similarities and differences between the two. When he writes of visions, for example, Inge recognizes the important part they played in the life of the early Church. He maintains that they occur today, but that they are much less frequent and not as highly valued.⁶⁴ Thirdly, Lonergan asks: “Do historians use ideal-types?”⁶⁵ He answers in the affirmative and defines an “ideal-type” as a “theoretical construct in which possible events are intelligibly related to constitute an internally coherent system.”⁶⁶ In his discussion of visions, Inge specifies three ideal visions that reveal truths about the nature of God: Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3); Isaiah, in the words “Holy, Holy, Holy” (Isaiah 6); and St. Peter in the vision of the sheet (Acts 10:9ff).⁶⁷ Fourthly, Lonergan asks whether historians follow a theory of history such that it goes beyond its scientific, philosophical or theological basis and makes statements about the actual course of human events in the past. Lonergan denigrates this kind of general hypothesis and one notes its absence in Christian Mysticism. Fifthly, Lonergan believes that

Historical explanation is a sophisticated extension of commonplace understanding. Its aim is an intelligent reconstruction of the past, not in its routines, but in each of its departures from the previous routine, in the interlocked consequences of each departure, in the unfolding of a process that theoretically might but in all probability never will be repeated.⁶⁸

⁶³ Ibid. 225.

⁶⁴ William Ralph Inge, Christian Mysticism 16-19.

⁶⁵ Lonergan, Method in Theology 227.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Inge, Christian Mysticism 18

⁶⁸ Lonergan, Method in Theology 230.

Inge relates the history of Christian mysticism reconstructing the past in this way. For example, in his presentation of the mystical elements in the writings of St. Augustine, Inge is conscientious in displaying the influences of Plotinus, the Manicheans, and the Gnostics. According to his “commonplace understanding,” he judiciously shows the prevalence of Neo-Platonic thought in St. Augustine and downplays that of the Manicheans and the Gnostics.⁶⁹ Sixthly, Lonergan inquires whether a historian investigates causes and determines laws. He asserts that a historian does not determine laws, and only in the common-sense meaning of “because” is a cause investigated. In his discussion of mystical elements in the Bible, for instance, Inge investigates the texts and states why they are considered mystical. Seventhly, Lonergan asks whether a historian is subject to social or cultural bias. He answers affirmatively because he believes:

All men [and women] are subject to bias, for a bias is a block or distortion of intellectual development, and such blocks or distortions occur in four principal manners. There is the bias of unconscious motivation...the bias of individual egoism...the bias of group egoism... [and] the general bias of common sense which is a specialization of intelligence in the particular and concrete, but usually considers itself omniscient.⁷⁰

Lonergan offers two ways in which the historian may eliminate his/her bias. One is to have his/her work evaluated by another historian and the other is to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible. In the Preface to the Seventh Edition of Christian Mysticism,⁷¹ Inge himself claims to have devoted himself only to the “philosophy of mysticism...the intellectual basis of mysticism” while he names others who have dealt extensively with areas related to his topic. By limiting his scope in this way, Inge intentionally tries to curb his bias, and thus he demonstrates his affinity with

⁶⁹ Inge, Christian Mysticism 128-132,

⁷⁰ Ibid. 231.

⁷¹ Inge, preface, Christian Mysticism ix.

Lonergan's thought. Lastly, Lonergan asks whether history is value-free. He maintains that history is value-free in its presentation of the past and in its appeal to empirical evidence, but that it is not value-free on the part of the historian who necessarily makes value judgments.⁷² In Christian Mysticism Inge puts before the reader much empirical evidence that is value-free, as Lonergan defines the term, but he is also unabashed in making his own value judgments about the material. This presentation has shown the relation of William Ralph Inge's Christian Mysticism to the functional specialty history as elaborated by Bernard Lonergan in his Method in Theology.

3.4. Relevance of Lonergan's Theory within a Modern Liberal Context

Lonergan's method can be related to a modern liberal perspective because both recognize the many branches of human knowledge in which modern people are involved and the necessity for collaboration among the specialists in each field in order to arrive at truth. Charles Raven, one of the Anglican proponents of modern liberalism discussed in Chapter Two, held that a synoptic view of life was the only means of arriving at such a realization.⁷³ Lonergan also expresses this belief when he writes about the functional specialty of communications. Thus he states:

Let me say that such integrated studies correspond to a profound exigence in the contemporary situation. For ours is a time of ever increasing change due to an ever increasing expansion of knowledge. To operate on the level of our day is to apply the best available knowledge and the most efficient techniques to coordinated group action...It will bring theologians into close contact with experts in very many different fields. It will bring scientists and scholars into close contact with policy makers and planners, and, through them, with clerical

⁷² Ibid. 232-233. It would seem that when Lonergan maintains that history is "value-free" he ignores what he has said already about perspectivism. Perspectivism not only points to the complexity of the history being evaluated, it also indicates the diversity that exists among historians, their initial purposes, their goals and their backgrounds. See Method in Theology 216-218 for further clarification of this issue.

⁷³ Charles Earle Raven, The Creator Spirit (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928) 288.

and lay workers engaged in applying solutions to the problems and finding ways to meet the needs both of Christians and of all mankind.⁷⁴

Through communication and collaboration of specialists from each field of human endeavor, both Raven and Lonergan envision the possibility of arriving at solutions to world problems.

Furthermore, proponents of modern liberalism, such as Raven, desire to heal the split between science and religion by advocating the same method of observation, testing, induction, and the formulation of hypotheses for all fields of study, including history and theology. This resonates with Lonergan's epistemology that is based on experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding in every human act of knowing. Raven himself states that the rift between science and religion arose because the proponents in each field limited themselves to their own respective points of view.⁷⁵ This corresponds to Lonergan's discussion of horizons. A horizon is a person's limitation of his field of vision. Lonergan proposes, and Raven would agree, that an exchange of information must take place among people who have different horizons. He writes:

Workers, foremen, supervisors, technicians, engineers, managers, doctors, lawyers, professors have different interests. They live in a sense in different worlds. Each is familiar with his own world. But each also knows about the others, and each recognizes the need for the others. So their many horizons in some measure include one another and, for the rest, they complement one another. Singly they are not self-sufficient, and together they represent the motivations and the knowledge needed for the functioning of a communal world.⁷⁶

Liberalism aspires to such interdependence since it recognizes the equal status of all perspectives, that is, all horizons, and the valid contributions of each.

⁷⁴ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 367.

⁷⁵ Charles Earle Raven, Science, Religion and the Future, Library of Anglican Spirituality (London: Mowbray, 1994) 1-4.

⁷⁶ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 236.

Another area in which liberalism and Lonergan's method in theology parallel each other is in their view of the purpose or goal of human endeavor. For Lonergan, one engages in theology in order to know God. This knowledge is gained first and foremost through participation in one or more of the functional specialties that prompt the intellectual, moral, and religious conversion of the individual. When one is converted religiously, he/she aspires to union with God. Raven's purpose is similar because he desires to find an adequate symbol for religious experience, or union with God. He locates this symbol in Christ and advocates study, interpretation, and emulation of the God-man in order to bring us closer to God and into a more perfect communion with each other.⁷⁷

The other proponent of modern Protestant liberalism discussed in Chapter Two was John A. T. Robinson. It was noted that in Honest to God, Robinson expresses a concern about the language with which we speak about God. Accordingly, scientific awareness has undermined our speaking about God as being "up there" or "out there." Robinson suggests that Tillich's representation of God as the "Depth of Existence, the Ground of our being" is more appropriate and more meaningful for a modern scientifically attuned audience. A similar concern appears in Method in Theology when Lonergan discusses the eighth functional specialty, communications. He is adamant that those who preach the gospel know the language and the culture of the people they are addressing. Thus he writes:

The Christian message is to be communicated to all nations. Such communication presupposes that preachers and teachers enlarge their horizons to include an accurate and intimate understanding of the culture and the language of

⁷⁷ Charles Earle Raven, Science, Religion, and the Future 121.

the people they address. They must grasp the virtual resources of that culture and that language, and they must use those virtual resources creatively...⁷⁸

Robinson would certainly agree, and he would extend this understanding to include not only people of different cultures, but also those possessing a modern scientifically oriented mind-set.

Loneragan and Robinson also speak in similar terms when they are discussing sin and redemption. Lonergan writes:

The church is a redemptive process. The Christian message, incarnate in Christ scourged and crucified, dead and risen, tells not only of God's love but also of man's sin. Sin is alienation from man's authentic being, which is self-transcendence, and sin justifies itself by ideology. As alienation and ideology are destructive of community, so the self-sacrificing love that is Christian charity reconciles alienated man to his true being, and undoes the mischief initiated by alienation and consolidated by ideology.⁷⁹

Paralleling these ideas, Robinson states:

It is this union-in-estrangement with the Ground of our being...that we mean by hell. But equally it is the union-in-love with the Ground of our being, such as we see in Jesus Christ, that is the meaning of heaven. And it is the offer of that life, in all its divine depth, to overcome the estrangement and alienation of existence as we know it that the New Testament speaks of as the "new creation." This new reality is transcendent, it is "beyond" us, in the sense that it is not ours to command. Yet we experience it, like the Prodigal, as we "come to ourselves."⁸⁰

Both Lonergan and Robinson speak of sin as alienation from our true authentic being.

For both, the redemption from sin as alienation can be found in the incarnate Christ. It is through him as divine gift that we overcome alienation and come to our authentic selves which is transcendent, based in Christian charity (a union-in-love with the Ground of our being), and makes us a new creation.

⁷⁸ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 362.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 364.

⁸⁰ John A. T. Robinson, Honest to God (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963) 80.

When Robinson speaks of a “new creation” that is “transcendent” and that can be “experienced,” he is referring to the same phenomenon which Lonergan calls religious conversion. Unlike Lonergan, he does not distinguish an intellectual and moral conversion; however, that he means religious conversion by what he calls a “union-in-love with the Ground of our being” cannot be denied.

3.5. Relevance of Lonergan’s Theory within a Conservative Orthodox Context

Conservative orthodoxy within Anglicanism has always claimed to stand on the firm foundation of the metaphorical three-legged stool comprising Holy Scripture, Tradition, and Reason informed by both of these. By Holy Scripture is meant, of course, the two Testaments. Tradition includes the three creeds (the Nicene, the Apostles’ and the Athanasian), the pronouncements of the first four general councils (Nicaea, 325; Constantinople I, 381; Ephesus, 431; and Chalcedon, 451), and the writings of the Fathers of the Church who lived during the first five centuries of Christendom. Necessarily recognizing the diversity in intent and context of the ancient texts, Lonergan, too, would uphold these formative writings of the Christian faith, for he writes:

While the New Testament writings spoke more to the heart than to the head, the Christological councils aimed solely at formulating the truths that were to guide one’s mind and one’s lips.⁸¹

Both in the conservative orthodox strand of Anglicanism and within Lonergan’s Method in Theology, then, one finds a healthy respect for the historical writings of Christianity.

When Lonergan discusses the first four functional specialties (data, research,

⁸¹ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 327.

interpretation and dialectic) he specifies that these are concerned with theological reflection on the ideals, the beliefs, and the performance of the representatives of the religion under investigation. Foundations, the fifth functional specialty, however, is different. He characterizes foundations in these words:

But in a second, mediated phase, theological reflection took a much more personal stance. It was no longer to be content to narrate what others proposed, believed, did. It has to pronounce which doctrines were true, how they could be reconciled with one another and with the conclusions of science, philosophy, history, and how they could be communicated appropriately to the members of each class in every culture.⁸²

The functional specialty, foundations, is concerned with this “much more personal stance.”

In discussing the theology of Austin Farrer, the proponent of conservative orthodoxy in Anglicanism mentioned in Chapter Two, in relation to Lonergan’s Method in Theology, one determines that the functional specialty foundations is most appropriate. Farrer wrote Saving Belief a year after the publication of John A. T. Robinson’s controversial Honest to God. He states in the “Preface” to this work that he is writing about “saving faith and the objects of its belief.” In Saving Belief Farrer is fulfilling the following, that is, what Lonergan deems the theological specialist in foundations does:

At its real root, then, foundations occurs on the fourth level of human consciousness, on the level of deliberation, evaluation, decision. It is a decision about whom and what you are for and, again, whom and what you are against. It is a decision illuminated by the manifold possibilities exhibited in dialectic. It is a fully conscious decision about one’s horizon, one’s outlook, one’s world-view.⁸³

In Saving Belief Farrer articulates a conservative orthodox position on several essentials of the Christian faith, and it would seem that he adopted this stance, or in Lonergan’s

⁸² Ibid. 267.

⁸³ Ibid. 268.

terms, limited his horizon in this way, in order to refute the prevailing liberal theological views expressed by Robinson in Honest to God. Furthermore, Lonergan states that “deliberate decision about one’s horizon is high achievement”;⁸⁴ thus Lonergan unknowingly lauds Farrer for having chosen his particular position.

In addition, Lonergan states that the “theologian has a contribution of his own to make...he possesses some autonomy, for otherwise he could make no contribution that was his own.”⁸⁵ Once again, Lonergan is speaking as if he has Farrer in mind. Lonergan also integrates conversion with his theological method and specifies the position of Farrer with regard to both. He writes:

Moreover, on the present account of theological method, there has been worked out the criterion that is to guide the theologian in the exercise of his autonomy. For the functional specialty, dialectic, assembles, classifies, analyzes the conflicting views of evaluators, historians, interpreters, researchers. The functional specialty, foundations, determines which views are the positions that proceed from the presence of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion, and which are the counter-positions that reveal its absence. In other words, each theologian will judge the authenticity of the authors of views, and he will do so by the touchstone of his own authenticity.⁸⁶

Farrer has already been related to Lonergan’s Method in Theology as a theologian who is concerned with the functional specialty, foundations. Here Lonergan admits that those theologians who deal with foundations are capable of recognizing intellectual, moral, and religious conversion in the viewpoints of others.

In actuality, Farrer reflects Lonergan’s thought throughout Saving Belief, for his purpose therein is to define certain essentials of the faith for Christian believers, namely Faith and Evidence, Providence and Evil, Creed and History, Sin and Redemption, Law

⁸⁴ Ibid. 269.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 331.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 331.

and Spirit, Heaven and Hell. He thus recognizes the necessity of expressing a common meaning that is constitutive of the Christian community itself. This coincides with the following thoughts by Lonergan himself:

Community is not just an aggregate of individuals within a frontier, for that overlooks its formal constituent, which is common meaning. Such common meaning calls for a common field of experience and, when that is lacking, people get out of touch. It calls for common or complementary ways of understanding...

Such common meaning is doubly constitutive. In each individual it is constitutive of the individual as a member of the community. In the group of individuals it is constitutive of the community.⁸⁷

By defining the essentials of the Christian faith, as indeed Farrer does in Saving Belief, he fulfills what Lonergan implies here, expressing the common meanings that are constitutive of the Christian community itself.

It must also be emphasized that Farrer was moved to write Saving Belief because of the dialectic, the conflict, arising between the liberal perspective expressed by Robinson in Honest to God and his own conservative orthodox position on certain essentials of the faith. It was dialectic, as Lonergan describes it, that spawned this book.

Dialectic...deals with conflicts. The conflicts may be overt or latent. They may lie in religious sources, in the religious tradition, in the pronouncements of authorities, or in the writings of theologians...But beyond these there are fundamental conflicts stemming from an explicit or implicit cognitional theory, an ethical stance, a religious outlook...The function of dialectic will be to bring such conflicts to light, and to provide a technique that objectifies subjective differences and promotes conversion.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Ibid. 356-357.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 235.

Not only do the conflicts between Farrer and Robinson arise in their writings; they also stem from different ethical stances and diverse religious outlooks. However, it can be said that both stances can promote conversion as Lonergan has described it.

3.6. Affinities and Differences between Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism in Applying Lonergan's Theory of Conversion

In order to determine the affinities and differences between Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism in applying Lonergan's theory of conversion, the conversion experiences of Thomas Merton, a Roman Catholic, and Austin Farrer, an Anglican, will be discussed. Walter Conn⁸⁹ has already analyzed Thomas Merton's conversion experience in terms of Lonergan's theory, which delineates a three-fold conversion: intellectual, moral, and religious, and so a reliance on his ideas will prove fruitful. Austin Farrer's conversion experience will be analyzed because his conservative orthodox theological stance resembles that of the Roman Catholic, Thomas Merton.

According to Conn, Merton first demonstrated the beginnings of an intellectual conversion when he wrote about his own personal experience in the monastery toward the end of his autobiographical The Seven Storey Mountain. As Conn states:

Though containing only a few hints of this new critical direction among its hundreds of pages which naively condemn the ugliness, duplicity, and sin of the world and glorify the goodness, simplicity, and purity of the monastery...it is the first time we hear the monk's own prose voice speaking about his own experience, rather than the dubbed voice of the earlier pious works on Cistercian sanctity.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Walter Conn, Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender (New York: Paulist Press, 1986.) 288-268.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 232.

Merton thus was beginning to take a second look at the “world” and reassessing his first negative estimate of it as well as taking a second look at the institution and authority of the church and the monastery and revising the romantic view he had of them during his early monastic years. Merton’s intellectual conversion grew out of his developing ability to accept paradox and contradiction both in the world and in the monastery. For instance, his search for solitude in the monastery was oddly satisfied by his involvement with the novices as he fulfilled his role as Master of Novices,⁹¹ and his withdrawal from the world conversely led to his greater involvement in the social and political dimensions of life, especially the issues of racism and peace.⁹²

Merton’s intellectual conversion was also greatly influenced by his reading and experience of the spiritual wisdom of the Orient, especially Zen. As Conn points out:

Because this critical cognitive conversion was experienced by a contemplative poet in a context that was not only intrinsically moral but fundamentally religious, there was no possibility of its taking the rationalistic shape of absolute autonomy.⁹³

Instead, his association with Zen helped Merton develop a critical consciousness that would settle for nothing less than the one true Absolute, the Divine Mystery or in Lonergan’s terms, Ultimate Truth or God.

Conn indicates that Merton’s moral conversion became evident when he began to question external authority and when he distinguished the “fundamental meanings and values of his life from the symbols which carry them.”⁹⁴ Thus Merton was moved to ask:

Just because a cross is a cross, does it follow that it is the cross God intends for you?
Just because a job is a nuisance, is it therefore good for you?

⁹¹ Ibid. 246.

⁹² Ibid. 247.

⁹³ Ibid. 260.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 234.

Is it an act of virtue for a contemplative to sit down and let himself be snowed under by activities?

Does the fact that all this is obedience make it really pleasing to God?⁹⁵

This critical reflection would lead Merton gradually through deep moral conversion which would allow him to give himself over to several of the most important and difficult social issues of his day. Moreover, on one of his excursions beyond the walls of the monastery, Merton became overwhelmed as he stood in the center of the shopping district in Louisville by the realization that he loved all the people who surrounded him. He recounts how it was “like waking from a dream of separateness, or spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness.”⁹⁶ Gradually, then, Merton’s moral conversion substantiated the good in the world outside the monastery as well as the need of a genuine life of solitude to be oriented to this world.

Another influence on Merton’s moral conversion was Gandhi. Merton equated Gandhi’s “doing the truth in charity” with the New Testament standard of “doing all things in the name of Christ.”⁹⁷ He came to believe that there was an objective moral good, a good that corresponds to “the real value of being, which brings out and confirms the inner significance of our life when we obey its norms.”⁹⁸ Sometimes, Merton believed, one must go against society’s norms in order to conform to the objective moral good. Moreover, Merton writes:

But acting in accord with the norms of objective good integrates us into the whole living movement and development of the cosmos, it brings us into harmony with all the rest of the world, it situates us in our place, it helps us fulfill our task and to

⁹⁵ Ibid. 233. Conn is quoting from Merton’s The Sign of Jonas (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953) 46.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 248. Conn is quoting here from Merton’s Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander (New York: Image Books, 1968) 156.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 250.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 250.

participate fruitfully in the whole world's work and its history, as it reaches out for its ultimate meaning and fulfillment.⁹⁹

Such a belief indicates the presence of moral conversion in the monk who at one time thought that withdrawing from the evil world into the solitude of the cloister was the only way to true holiness. Instead, as he wrote in Seeds of Destruction, "the monastic community is deeply implicated...in the economic, political, and social structures of the contemporary world."¹⁰⁰ Such a principled morality led Merton to make a public and firm stand against the proliferation of nuclear armaments during the Cold War simply as a means to avert the threat of atheistic Communism.¹⁰¹ His personal decision in this regard demonstrates moral conversion in Lonergan's terms.

Merton's religious conversion, on the other hand, is couched in the metaphor of a search for God in his true self. At times he struggles with the absolute autonomy he desires to maintain which inhibits his total trust in the Almighty.¹⁰² At other times, as he expresses in Seeds of Contemplation, he seeks to escape the prison of the false self in order to reach the true inner self, and God. This escape is the "only true joy on earth" because through it one enters "by love into union with the Life Who dwells and sings within the essence of every creature and in the core of our own souls."¹⁰³ Conn elucidates Merton's distinction between the false self and the true self by relating it to Lonergan's theory of conversion in this way:

If we identify Merton's image of the true, inner self with Lonergan's drive for self-transcendence which is sometimes realized in reasonable judgment, responsible decision, faithful commitment, and genuine love, we can understand how Merton's true self is both already existing (though hidden) and to be created.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 250. Conn is quoting here from Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander 119.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Merton, Seeds of Destruction (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1964) 7.

¹⁰¹ Walter Conn, Christian Conversion 252.

¹⁰² Ibid. 234 quotes Merton in The Sign of Jonas 76 where he writes: "I only say I trust You, my actions prove that the one I trust is myself..."

¹⁰³ Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation (New York: Dell, 1949) 16.

In simplest terms, the true self exists as drive for self-transcendence, but is still to be fully created as an actually self-transcending person (though each of us is somewhere along in the process).¹⁰⁴

The true self for which Merton seeks is, then, in Lonergan's terms, the fully conscious personal subject who is intellectually, morally, and religiously converted.

At another point in his discussion of Merton's religious conversion, Conn offers a definition that further clarifies its meaning. Conn writes:

Christian religious conversion is a fundamental shift from the instinctive but illusory assumption of absolute autonomy, the spontaneously defensive posture of radical, self-sufficient egocentrism, to the reflective openness and personal commitment of love in the total surrender of self to God. The realistic recognition that one's very being is a gift of love prompts the loving gift of one's entire life.¹⁰⁵

Such a shift can be seen in the life of Thomas Merton as he moved from a preoccupation with his own need for solitude and his own desire to develop a life of holiness away from the world to a life devoted to some of the most dire causes and concerns of the entire world and then to a life surrendered totally to the will of God for him.

In comparing the life and work of Austin Farrer with those of Thomas Merton, one finds both similarities and differences. Still Farrer, too, exhibits the characteristics of Lonergan's three-fold experience of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. It must be stated first that Farrer never felt the need to withdraw from the world, as Merton did, in order to serve God. Rather, he was well immersed in married life and in the academic life of Oxford. He also belonged to a circle of contemporaries and friends that included such well-known figures as C.S. Lewis, Dorothy L. Sayers, Charles Williams, and J. R. R. Tolkien. Secondly, although both men were ordained priests in their respective

¹⁰⁴ Walter Conn, Christian Conversion 257.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 258.

churches, Merton, of course, professed a life of celibacy, while Farrer married, became the devoted husband to Katherine Newton, and fathered a daughter named Caroline.

Both men were prolific in writing about the faith in theological terms that were, nevertheless, comprehensible to a wide audience and which also bore fruit in the lives of others. Both men also personally counseled others; Merton, as Master of Scholastics and then as Novice Master, and Farrer as chaplain and tutor of St. Edmund Hall, as fellow and chaplain of Trinity College, and then as warden of Keble College at Oxford.¹⁰⁶ Both men highly esteemed the duties of priests dedicating themselves to the care of souls whether through the spoken or written word or through the sacraments. In both men one observes that singularity of purpose: to do the will of God in their lives and by so doing, to serve others.

Farrer's intellectual conversion finds its roots in the influence of his father, a Baptist minister, who encouraged him to value scholarship.¹⁰⁷ As a result, while at St. Paul's School, London, Farrer earned a scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford. At Oxford, Farrer excelled in his studies and earned several other scholarships. Farrer's intellectual acumen would lead him later to write biblical interpretations that were highly original. Because of this, they were both appreciated and questioned. Charles Hefling characterizes Farrer's scriptural interpretations in this way:

Certainly his writings on the Bible are extraordinary, and they are original in the sense that they are neither derivative nor commonplace. There is nothing else quite like them. Yet their originality is such as to be a liability as well. What Farrer wrote about the New Testament was peculiar, not to say idiosyncratic, when he wrote it, and since then neither his unorthodox method nor his

¹⁰⁶ Philip Curtis, *A Hawk among Sparrows: A Biography of Austin Farrer* (London: SPCK, 1985) 126 writes: "The ordinary undergraduate was amused by Farrer's whimsicality: only the more perceptive were aware of his spiritual depth and intellect. From his life of prayer there flowed the teaching, the friendship and the priestly guidance which were always available for his pupils."

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 14. Curtis states: "Austin's career at St. Paul's revealed that he had inherited his father's 'respect for truth' and a 'marked critical attitude.'"

unorthodox conclusions seem to have commended themselves to the community of New Testament scholars...

That, of course, does not mean that he is wrong. He might be a voice of sanity crying out in an exegetical wilderness, a prophet without honor among his own professional colleagues.¹⁰⁸

Farrer's scriptural interpretations may stand apart from any others, and yet they are not difficult to understand. One needs only to think the author's thoughts in order to penetrate to their meaning. The fact that Farrer puts forth his own method of interpretation is one indication of the integrity of the author who has experienced an intellectual conversion in Lonergan's terms and believes that his method is true to himself and to the work at hand. Just as Thomas Merton's intellectual conversion can be demonstrated in his growing awareness of the contradictions and paradoxes in the world and in the monastery, and his ability to write about them, so, too, there is evidence of Austin Farrer's intellectual conversion in his ability to write truthfully about Scripture as he understands it to be, regardless of his not receiving support from other biblical scholars. His taking a stand for the truth as he understood it constitutes intellectual conversion as Lonergan defines it.

If Lonergan's definition of moral conversion involves a turning from mere satisfactions to what is valuable and good, then evidence of such a conversion may be noted in Farrer's devotion to his wife Katherine and to his daughter Caroline, despite many hardships, and in his care and concern for the students entrusted to him. Although Farrer fell in love with his wife while she was a student, he did not marry her until after

¹⁰⁸ Charles Hefling, "Farrer's Scriptural Divinity," Captured by the Crucified: The Practical Theology of Austin Farrer, ed. David Hein and Edward Hugh Henderson (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004) 150.

she had obtained her degree. Their daughter was born two years later, and she had learning disabilities. Both Austin and Katherine worked very hard to provide for the special education of Caroline; however, this weighed heavily on their marriage and on Farrer especially. Still, he never wavered in his devotion to his wife or his daughter, caring for them as well as for the students under him at Oxford.¹⁰⁹ In his assessment of his character and of the concern Austin Farrer showed for others, Robert Boak Slocum writes:

He also had a great capacity for charity and understanding towards the individual human being and his problems, as well as a wit and humour that had their spring not only in a quick intellect but in a fundamental tolerance and love bred of a deep understanding of human weaknesses. It could well be said of Farrer (as he once said of another clergyman) that pastoral care and plain friendliness were the same for him.¹¹⁰

In comparing Farrer's moral conversion with that of Thomas Merton, one notes the growing preoccupation of the latter with political and social issues, while the former, obviously encumbered by familial problems, needed to limit his scope to home and college. Both, however, exhibited values that embraced promoting the well-being of others; thus they both far exceeded their own personal desire for self-satisfaction and by doing so, they demonstrated the seeds of moral conversion in Lonergan's terms.

Any discussion of Farrer's religious conversion must begin by noting that his father was a Baptist minister and that he was brought up in that faith. As he matured, however, he began to find the divisions within the Baptist Church disturbing, and so

¹⁰⁹ Philip Curtis, *A Hawk among Sparrows* 128 quotes Michael Goulder, a student of Farrer's as saying: "As a tutor he was brilliant, and one emerged from a tutorial laden with pearls of great price..." On page 129, another student, Stephen Willink comments: "...The friendship which he and his greatly beloved wife, Kay, offered was incontestably Oxford's greatest gift. We laid at his feet our doubts and enthusiasms and never doubted that even the most intractable personal problem, once submitted to his scrutiny, would be robbed of its terror."

¹¹⁰ Robert Boak Slocum, *Light in a Burning Glass* (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 2007) 3.

shortly after he went to the university, Farrer became an Anglican. As time went on, he found his spiritual home at St. Barnabas Church in Oxford where his theology and spirituality became profoundly catholic in doctrine and high church in style.

If Merton's religious conversion can be seen in his search for his true self, Farrer's may be observed similarly in his writing of a search for ultimate truth. This is much more than merely apprehending the truth involved in intellectual conversion. The truth for which Farrer searches involves a complete obedience to the will of God. Thus he preached from the pulpit:

We must put our confidence in *truth*. But that doesn't mean sitting back, and waiting for the truth to shine from above, as one might sit back and wait for the day to break. It means following with devoted obedience the truth *we have seen* as true, with an entire confidence in God, that he will correct, clear and redirect our vision, to the perception of a freer and a deeper truth. Go with the truth you have, and let it carry you into collision with the hard rocks of fact, and then you'll learn something.¹¹¹

This seeking after and aligning oneself with the truth of which Farrer speaks consists in two things: "first, a passionate concern for what we conceive the will of God to be; and second, an entire submission to the will of God, as God actually means it to be."¹¹² It is truth as submission to the will of God that constitutes Farrer's religious conversion.

At another point in his writings, Farrer speaks of what happens when we integrate our will with the divine. He writes:

It is natural to expect that the integration of our will with the Creative Will should enhance, enrich and bless our personal being, and others through us. On the supposition that God is truly what we believe him, it would be odd if our giving ourselves to him made us on the whole more restless, more frustrated, less able to manage our relations with others or to discipline our own passions, less generous or outgoing, less alive all over. The signs of blessing can fairly be looked for; but

¹¹¹ Austin Farrer, "The Transforming Will," in The End of Man (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973) 104.

¹¹² Ibid. 106.

at the best they are confirmatory evidence of a relationship which must be its own proof.¹¹³

This giving of self over to the divine will is another way of speaking about religious conversion. What Merton characterized as a total surrender of self to God, which is religious conversion, Farrer expresses as an integration of our will with the Creative Will.

The interaction of our will with the Creative Will of God involves Farrer's belief in what is called "Double Agency." Our submission to the principles of Double Agency is yet another way of defining religious conversion. Farrer states:

But God does not stand alongside us or on a level with us, nor do we become aware of him through any external collision, mutual impingement or interaction between his activity and ours. How could we? He is related to us in quite another way: as the will which underlies our existence, gives rise to our action and directs our aim...How can we have experimental knowledge of the will behind our will? Only by opening our will to it, by sinking our will in it; there is no other conceivable way. We cannot touch God except by willing the will of God. Then his will takes effect in ours and we know it; not that we manipulate him, but that he possesses us.¹¹⁴

Lonergan speaks of religious conversion as the transformation of the existential subject into a "subject in love, a subject held, grasped, possessed, owned through a total and so other-worldly love."¹¹⁵ Is not this similar to what Merton calls a total surrender of self to God and what Farrer expresses is involved in Double Agency?

It is clear from this comparison of the conversion experiences of the Roman Catholic Thomas Merton and the Anglican Austin Farrer that there are far more similarities than differences between them when the principles of Bernard Lonergan's theory of conversion are applied. This demonstrates the possibility of exploring

¹¹³ Austin Farrer, "Experimental Proof," in God Is Not Dead (New York: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1966) 110.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 106-107.

¹¹⁵ Lonergan, Method in Theology 242.

Loneragan's categories within the lives of real people. In Chapter Four of this dissertation, Lonergan's theory will be applied to the lives of Susan Howatch's three main characters in the Starbridge series. Thus a literary application of Bernard Lonergan's theory of conversion will be observed, discussed, and analyzed.

Chapter 4

Lonergan's Intellectual, Moral, and Religious Conversion in Susan Howatch's Novels of the Starbridge Series

4.1. Introduction

This chapter will illustrate and analyze the intellectual, moral, and religious conversion of Jonathan Darrow, Neville Aysgarth, and Charles Ashworth, the three main characters in Susan Howatch's Starbridge Series. Then the similarities and differences among the three characters' conversion experiences will be shown. The discussion will proceed according to Bernard Lonergan's definition of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion as they appear in his Method in Theology.

4.2. Analysis of the Three-Fold Conversion Experience of Jonathan Darrow

According to Bernard Lonergan, the process of intellectual conversion involves the apprehension of truth or the reality of a situation. It goes beyond merely seeing what

appears to be to understanding what reality is. Intellectual conversion engages one in experiencing, understanding, judging and believing the truth.¹

To illustrate further the truth that a person who has undergone intellectual conversion apprehends, Lonergan distinguishes the experiences of an empiricist, an idealist, and a critical realist. Thus he explains:

The empiricist restricts objective knowledge to sense experience; for him, understanding and conceiving, judging and believing are merely subjective activities. The idealist insists that human knowing always includes understanding as well as sense; but he retains the empiricist's notion of reality, and so he thinks of the world mediated by meaning as not real but ideal. Only the critical realist can acknowledge the facts of human knowing and pronounce the world mediated by meaning to be the real world; and he can do so only inasmuch as he shows that the process of experiencing, understanding, and judging is a process of self-transcendence.²

Intellectual conversion consists of this process of self-transcendence through which a person who is a critical-realist arrives at the truth about him/herself and about the world. As Lonergan states this process is “a conversion, a new beginning, a fresh start. It opens the way to ever further clarifications and developments.”³

In discussing the intellectual conversion of the mystic, Jonathan Darrow, as it is portrayed by Susan Howatch in the novels of the Starbridge series, one must first speak about the vision with which the second novel of the series, Glamorous Powers, begins.

This vision consists of the following:

[A] chapel...small but exquisite in its classical symmetry...There was no transept. A central aisle stretched to the altar at the east end. The altar-table was stark in its austerity, the only adornment consisting of a plain wooden cross...Walking across the empty space which separated the doors from the back pew, I could smell the lilies which were blooming in a vase beneath the brass memorial plaque on my right.

¹ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 240-241.

² Ibid. 238-239.

³ Ibid. 240.

The sun was penetrating the window which was set high in the wall to the left of the altar...Unless I stood south of the Equator I was witnessing the impossible, for the sun could never shine from the north.⁴

The only other item of note in this vision is a “suitcase...sprinkled with labels.”⁵ After the vision “dissolves,” as Darrow indicates that it does, he immediately interprets it to mean that he is supposed to leave the monastery and resume a life in the world, something which he does not desire to do. This vision precipitates Darrow’s visit to the Abbot General of the Fordites, Francis Ingram, and the lengthy series of interrogations that lead him to know the truth about himself, about his relationships with other people, about his vision, and also about Ingram, his interrogator.

With the purpose of uncovering the truth about his vision during his interrogations, Ingram forces Darrow to face the truth about himself and several of his relationships with other people. First, he has just lost through death the only spiritual director who has been able to curb his “glamorous powers,” namely, Father Darcy. Ingram pushes Darrow to recognize his loss and to face his grief.⁶ Secondly, Ingram forces Darrow to acknowledge his conflicted feelings for Lyle Ashworth, especially after she decides to plant an unwanted kiss on his cheek.⁷ Third, Ingram compels Darrow to face his fears regarding his age—he has just passed his sixtieth birthday—and his disappointment over not being chosen Abbot General.⁸ Fourth, he forces Darrow to realize his chagrin over the fact that his son Martin hasn’t confided in him sooner about his “un-Christian lifestyle”.⁹ Fifth, he makes Darrow admit that he was unhappily

⁴ Susan Howatch, Glamorous Powers (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1988) 4.

⁵ Ibid. 4.

⁶ Ibid. 50-52.

⁷ Ibid. 55-56; 74-75.

⁸ Ibid. 52; 75.

⁹ Ibid. 58-59; 76.

married to his first wife Betty.¹⁰ Sixth, he compels Darrow to acknowledge his guilt due to his relationship with Hilda, his mistress.¹¹ As his process of intellectual conversion in Lonergan's terms unfolds in this way, Darrow is made to experience, understand, judge, and believe the truth about himself and all of these relationships.

However, perhaps the greatest realization that emerges for Darrow as a result of these interrogations is the altered perception he gains of his rival Francis Ingram. At a crucial point in these interviews, immediately after he's had another "showing"¹² of the suitcase from his first vision, Darrow comes to understand the truth about Ingram:

I imagined him being brought up by some hired woman in his parents' vast mansion; I speculated that it had been his craving for affection as well as attention which had drawn him to a life of decadence; I thought of him enjoying every material comfort while his soul starved, and suddenly I was seeing him stumble across the Order, across different values and different people who would care for him in an entirely different way. Then I found I could easily picture him thriving at last in response to Father Darcy's powerful interest, and in a moment of enlightenment I realized that his bereavement when his mentor died must have run precisely parallel to my own.¹³

This second "showing" of the suitcase and this assessment of Ingram signify turning points in Darrow's intellectual conversion that move him to a deeper appreciation of the necessity for him to be utterly truthful with his rival. He signals this by saying to Ingram:

You can deduce that I now see my recent behaviour—all the lies and evasions, all the fears and anxieties—as demonstrating the most shameful lack of trust in God. I know now that all I have to do is have faith and trust that all will be well. If the vision's genuine, I'll be led to a new life in God's service. If the vision's false you'll arrange for me to be cared for until I can continue to serve God in the Order. So my task here's not to worry about whether you can exercise the charism of discernment; my task is to trust God by trusting you because only by

¹⁰ Ibid. 83-89.

¹¹ Ibid. 91-92.

¹² Ibid. 105. Darrow himself uses this word and refers specifically to the great medieval mystic when he says: "I believe it [the vision] was what Julian of Norwich would have called a 'showing.'" On Julian's influence in the Starbridge novels see Cheryl Forbes, "Julian of Norwich and Those Ambiguous Starbridge Women," Bruce Johnson and Charles Huttar, ed. *Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2005) 187-197.

¹³ Ibid. 104.

putting myself without reserve in your hands can God's will for me ever be conclusively revealed.¹⁴

These words indicate the depth of Darrow's intellectual conversion; they are also, in Lonergan's terms, sublated by religious overtones. After saying this to Ingram, Darrow confesses truthfully to the sham that was his marriage and to his failure to develop close fatherly relationships with his children. He confesses his guilt and his desire to enter the monastery as a way of atoning for his sins with regard to his family. Darrow faces the truth about his past, and to this point he furthers his intellectual conversion. However, when he interprets his vision as an elaborate allegory, he arrives at a wrong conclusion.

Thus he says mistakenly to Ingram:

I believe the ruined building behind the chapel represents my failure during my life in the world, and the chapel represents my life in the Order. The mysterious suitcase still represents change, but it's a change from a call underpinned by guilt to a call flowing from a psyche at peace. And the light at the end of my vision represents the confirmation of my call...the assurance that I'll be able to serve God as a monk even better than before now that I'm fully reconciled to the past.¹⁵

Ingram, on the other hand, sees the vision truthfully and objectively for what it is, a path into Darrow's future, and so he orders him to leave the monastery as soon as possible.

Darrow's exit from the monastery does not take place, however, before a deeper reconciliation with Ingram is realized. Accordingly, Ingram is moved to make his own confession to Darrow in these words:

How I've always envied you those 'glamorous powers,' Jonathan! When we were up at Cambridge, how *I* always longed to tell fortunes, conduct séances and hypnotize pretty girls into fulfilling my wildest dreams! And now, forty years later, I see to my shame and dismay that very little has changed. The envy's still there and it's there because I'm still hopelessly addicted to glamour. The old man [Father Darcy] did try to cure me, of course, but that was a case of the blind

¹⁴ Ibid. 105

¹⁵ Ibid. 109-110.

leading the blind—he was too addicted to glamour himself, the old rascal, to conduct the purging effectively.¹⁶

Such an admission on the part of Francis Ingram indicates the extent of his truthfulness that has been prompted by Darrow's candor in the midst of his intellectual conversion.

As a result of Darrow's intellectual conversion, then, his relationship with Ingram reaches a whole new level of honesty. This refurbished relationship will, in turn, help Darrow as he progresses in his process of conversion.

Later in the novel, after Darrow leaves the monastery, evidence of his intellectual conversion appears in his ability to confront his daughter Ruth with the truth about her own situation. After refusing her offer for him to live in her home, Darrow says to her:

“The truth is that your distress here isn't rooted in my response to your offer. It lies in the fact that your children are growing up, Roger's absorbed in his own activities and you've begun to feel your family don't need you any more.”

But this glimpse of reality was much too painful for her to face, and at once she rushed sobbing from the room.¹⁷

Ruth's “pathos,” as Darrow calls it, is followed by his “primitive” reaction to blame the man who made his daughter unhappy, Roger, her husband.¹⁸ When Darrow realizes that he had done no better in his relationship with his own wife, he blames himself for Ruth's “obsessive need for an attention that was paternal.” He also blames himself for his son Martin's homosexual orientation and alcoholism. Although it may be that a father's sins are often reaped in the behaviors of his children, the guilt Darrow feels is too heavy for him to bear, and “depression overwhelms” him again.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid. 117.

¹⁷ Ibid. 150.

¹⁸ Ibid. 152.

¹⁹ Ibid. 152-153.

Darrow also faces the truth about himself and his own sexual needs. He believes that, as a priest in the world, a celibate life is the only answer for him, but he reflects how utterly impossible this would be. He ponders his problem in this area in these words:

I was reviewing with a bleak clinical eye all my sexual responses to the world to which I had returned. They had ranged from the innocent pleasure of watching a pretty girl cross a road to the salacious stimulation of seeing scantily clad women in newspaper photographs, from the harmless day-dreams of courting an ideal woman to the obsessive knowledge that it was now within my power to dress as a layman, take a 'bus into central Starmouth and commit fornication.²⁰

Darrow knows that in the monastery he would have spiritual counsel and work to distract him from his temptations, but realizing that he is alone now in the world his “spirits hit rock-bottom” and he doubts he can “survive as a priest.”²¹ Such stark acknowledgment of the truth about himself is the effect of Darrow’s intellectual conversion.

Another example of Darrow’s tenacity for truthfulness regarding his personal feelings occurs still later in the novel when he realizes that he has fallen in love with Anne Barton-Woods. He muses on his sexual attraction to her:

I shall refrain from describing my mental and physical reactions as my carnal urges, exacerbated by years of celibacy, ploughed remorselessly through every particle of my being. As Francis had pointed out, never do moral convictions seem so insubstantial as when a man is invaded by a powerful sexual desire. Suffice it to say that after a sleepless night I took a cold bath, rejected the possibility of eating breakfast and walked to the post office to enquire about accommodations in the village.²²

On the one hand, although Darrow is utterly truthful with himself here about his sexual

²⁰ Ibid. 153.

²¹ Ibid. 153.

²² Ibid. 211.

arousal, on the other hand, he does exhibit what Lonergan calls a “breakdown”²³ when he begins to tell Anne about his deceased wife, their marriage, and his children. He shrouds these revelations in “a few pale platitudes,” as he says, divulging only half-truths. He begins valiantly, but fails miserably to tell Anne the whole truth:

“Talking of confessions, I really must tell you all about Betty and my children,” I said with commendable determination, but then found to my horror that I was unable to continue.

In panic I scraped together a few pale platitudes...I told myself I really could not let the lie about a call [to serve at sea] pass. But I did. I was too frightened of being judged a deserting husband who had walked out on his loving wife.

Sweat prickled the nape of my neck. I dared not look at her...I told myself I really could not gloss over my difficult years as a widower. But I did. I was terrified that she might recoil when she heard how I had not only failed to live as a priest should but had even jilted the woman who loved me.²⁴

Later on, after his monologue of half-truths, Darrow rationalizes about the reason why he was not completely truthful with Anne. This demonstrates further a breakdown in his intellectual conversion in Lonergan’s terms. Darrow thinks:

That night I reflected for a long time on this harrowing conversation with Anne, but eventually I told myself it was neither possible nor desirable to attain an absolute honesty in a single interview. There was too much emotional constraint on my side and too much emotional vulnerability on hers.

After a long while I repeated to myself that I would, of course, tell Anne everything; it was unthinkable that I should even consider not telling her everything; but I would not tell her everything just yet. The revelations had to be made little by little at carefully judged intervals, and meanwhile a long, healing silence seemed called for.²⁵

Darrow’s hesitancy to divulge the whole truth to Anne about his familial relationships is all the more poignant since he admonishes Charles Ashworth by saying: “...follow the advice I gave you earlier at the chapel and have an honest conversation with Lyle about

²³ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971) 243. See Chapter Three, page 122 of this dissertation for Lonergan’s explication and application of the term “breakdown” to intellectual, moral, and religious conversion.

²⁴ Susan Howatch, *Glamorous Powers* 229-230.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 231-232.

your mother. I can't stress to you how important it is that a husband and wife should feel able to confide in each other on even the most difficult subject." Although he subsequently hears Father Darcy urging him with the words "Physician, heal thyself," he does nothing but pretend not to hear them.²⁶

On their honeymoon, however, Jon does admit the truth about himself after he has exercised his powers of healing on Anne. His candor illustrates the process of intellectual conversion as it continues to unfold. He confesses to his wife:

Healing demands high standards. Father Darcy was always convinced I was temperamentally unsuited to any healing ministry which extended beyond the counseling of men.

The humility required for such a ministry is so great that it really has to be inborn. I'm not naturally a humble person—I can attain humility, but I have to work hard to achieve it. My natural inclination is to be proud and arrogant.²⁷

After this admission, Anne questions Jon about his odd relationship with Father Darcy.

He continues in a truthful vein as he speaks of his mentor in these terms:

He *was* a monster. I detested him all the while I was admiring him...

We were two mountaineers roped together and he was showing me the way up the mountain. That meant that the essence of our relationship consisted of neither love nor hate but trust. I trusted him to lead me to the top and he trusted in my ability to follow him there. As men we disliked each other but as psychics we found each other fascinating and as monks we were obliged to love each other as brothers.²⁸

After Jon delivers this truthful assessment of his relationship with Father Darcy to Anne, he once again suffers a "breakdown" in Lonergan's terms when he expresses his need to shield Anne from the truth about his own fears and his true feelings as their honeymoon draws to an end. He thinks:

I saw so clearly then that in order to maintain her love I had to protect her from my irrational peculiarities. I had to be the kind of husband she wanted me to be:

²⁶ Ibid. 238.

²⁷ Ibid. 255-256.

²⁸ Ibid. 257.

youthful, strong, sane, wise, authoritative, confident, fearless, sexually accomplished—and bewitchingly endowed with all manner of glamorous powers.²⁹

This unrealistic façade behind which Darrow decides to hide from his wife Anne is matched only by his neglect to tell her truthfully about his children. Both instances represent apparent breakdowns in his intellectual conversion geared toward the truth.

When she discovers how Ruth and Martin really are, Anne explodes with: “What’s much more important is that Martin’s a homosexual alcoholic, and I’m very sorry indeed that you didn’t see fit to tell me that earlier.” And about Ruth she says:

That horrid, glossy, manicured bitch hating me behind her ghastly façade of refinement—why didn’t you warn me she was like that? The least you could have done was warn me, but no, you went on painting this utterly false picture of a charming housewife who disapproved of your quick marriage out of a saintly concern for your welfare! I was absolutely unprepared for her sheer vulgar awfulness, and then when she tried to trap me about Martin—oh, it was vile, *vile*—I hated every minute of her visit and I never want to see her again!³⁰

Only after this rampant outburst does Darrow relent and begin to “paint his painful portrait of the past.” Afterward, Anne tries to make him see how his guilt with regard to his children is misplaced and extreme, but Darrow continues to feel that his repentance is untrue and that he was nothing but an “inadequate parent” to Martin and Ruth. When Anne then questions him about what will happen when they have a child, Darrow begins to pray that they “might remain childless.”³¹

Subsequent to this prayer, Darrow repents privately, although he realizes that he “should have journeyed to Starwater Abbey” to make his confession to Cyril, the monk who serves as his confessor, but he claims he is too busy with his major problem, his

²⁹ Ibid. 263.

³⁰ Ibid. 273.

³¹ Ibid. 275

“ministry as a country priest.”³² What follows is a series of blunders in the parish that Darrow could have avoided if he had sought advice humbly from Cyril, or from Francis, the Abbot General, or if he had heeded the counsel of Aysgarth, the Archdeacon. Most of the offenses consist of his introduction of Anglo-Catholic practices into a parish that is decidedly Protestant-bent. In the midst of these difficulties which involve Mr. Pitkin, the churchwarden, principally, Darrow receives word that his son Martin, a homosexual pacifist-turned-soldier, has attempted suicide. After a difficult meeting with Aysgarth, the Archdeacon, Darrow feels “deeply depressed” when he encounters an opportunity to heal the church cleaning woman, Mrs. Purvis. Ignoring the truth that Father Darcy had always taught, that he should not use his glamorous powers for self-aggrandizement, Darrow yields to the temptation and thinks:

I felt as if someone had injected me with a drug which delivered instantaneous amnesia. I forgot the humiliating interview with Aysgarth, my unhappiness in my ministry and my misery over Martin. I was aware only that I was being offered the most alluring of challenges and beyond the challenge I sensed that an admiring audience was already poised to restore my self-esteem.³³

Confessing later to Anne that he had “healed” Mrs. Purvis of the symptoms of her lumbago only, and that he had used a mild form of hypnosis to do so, Darrow is bolstered into a jubilant and prideful mood by his wife’s adulation of him. However, she also advises him to seek Francis Ingram’s counsel regarding his establishing a healing ministry, but Darrow refuses this suggestion by claiming that he cannot find time to go to London. Darrow’s excuse is laced with avoidance and untruth. Referring to his life, he says that “everything in the garden *is* lovely” and that he only has “one or two little difficulties at the moment,” but that night he exhibits the strain he is under when he

³² Ibid. 275.

³³ Ibid. 286.

ponders that he “was unable to consummate” his marriage. All of this indicates his self-deception and signifies the beginning of another breakdown in his intellectual conversion.³⁴

As Darrow’s success as a “parson” with “miraculous powers” spreads throughout the parish, he begins to believe that his new call is indeed to a ministry of healing. This realization buoys his spirits and also gives him the impetus he needs to combat the skepticism of the local physician, Dr. Garrison. His elation is short-lived, however, for Anne returns from her second visit to her new physician, Dr. Romaine, and announces that she is having a baby. Hiding his real feelings of panic and guilt about the past, he tells his wife that he is “delighted by the news,” but actually he is sensing “terror of the future” and “a lethal despair.”³⁵ In his troubled state of mind, once again instead of seeking counsel from his confessor Cyril at Starwater Abbey or from Francis, the Abbot General, he rationalizes on why they could not understand his problems. He ponders:

What could a man who has never been a husband and father know of the terrible conflicts which were now grinding my psyche towards dementia? I thought how I enjoyed and needed marital intimacy yet often found it a physical strain and an emotional burden which interfered with my inner life; I thought how I wanted to give Anne a child yet recoiled from the prospect of fatherhood; I thought how my great longing for solitude was juxtaposed with my deep fear of losing Anne’s companionship. How could I even begin to explain these tortuous paradoxes to either Cyril or Francis? No childless celibate, no matter how sophisticated, could possibly understand.³⁶

Determined to remain his own counselor, Darrow next has a vision of a little boy named Nicholas. The vision calms his fears regarding the birth of his child and of fatherhood, and it succeeds, too, in turning his attention instead toward getting approval from the

³⁴ Ibid. 288-289.

³⁵ Ibid. 294-295.

³⁶ Ibid. 295.

Bishop and planning a healing service to be held in the parish church. He does this and, though it garners the approbation of his wife (“‘Darling, you were utterly wonderful!’ she exclaimed shining-eyed”³⁷), it also pits the Archdeacon against him (“Aysgarth said without hesitation: ‘Don’t use the parish church for the healing in future—in fact try to keep the healing ministry as separate as possible from your parish duties’”³⁸).

So, at the suggestion of the Archdeacon, Darrow comes to know that the chapel of his original vision, which matches in convincing detail the chapel that is on his wife’s estate, will be the place for his healing ministry. Bolstered by this realization, he finally writes what he refers to as his “first frank letter to Francis for some months.”³⁹ He speaks of his healing ministry in glowing terms, downplaying any opposition to it and confident that God has ordained it; he says that his marriage has “no problems whatsoever,” neglecting to deal with his real feelings about Anne, childbirth, and fatherhood; he tells Francis about his vision of a son, careful to portray it as a benign revelation indicating that all shall be well.⁴⁰ However, Francis astutely understands Darrow’s self-deception, and he urges him not only to see Cyril, his confessor, once a week, but also to come to London to visit him. Darrow declines the latter invitation, and this prompts Francis to characterize his breakdown in these stark terms:

I can’t stress too strongly how careful you must be not to jump to convenient conclusions. Why have you really undertaken this ministry of healing? It may well be a call from God, but until you’re completely honest with yourself about your motives, true discernment can only be displaced by wishful thinking, a self-deceiving frame of mind which will clog your psyche as you seek to open it to receive the Holy Spirit.⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid. 301.

³⁸ Ibid. 306.

³⁹ Ibid. 307.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 307-308.

⁴¹ Ibid. 311.

Even Anne expresses her fear that Jon is “tying” himself “into a knot again,” and she urges him to go to Starwater to see Cyril.⁴² He does this, but even then he refuses to acknowledge the truth that Cyril puts before him in these words:

My dear Jon...you're so busy being too proud to live on your wife's money that you wouldn't see a hint from God even if it were written in the sky in letters of fire! Now let's try to view the situation without pride—and without any preconceived opinions. If this call to heal is in fact a delusion, what would be the most likely work that God would wish you to do?⁴³

After his inadequate confession to Cyril, Jon arrives home and immediately goes to his cell where he confesses “directly to God,” as he says, “in Protestant fashion.” He knows that Cyril’s view of his healing ministry was faulty due to his own “inability to be honest with him,” so he tries to approach his current situation with “humility.” He decides to write to Wilfred, the infirmarian at Ruydale, who is more experienced with healing ministries than Cyril, and he asks him “not only for helpful hints but for stern criticism of any errors.”⁴⁴ When Wilfred responds, warning Jon not to try to heal everyone, not to conduct large healing services, not to overstrain his powers, and not to perform exorcisms,⁴⁵ he ignores all of this advice and eventually collapses from the strain.

In retrospect, Darrow recognizes the beginnings of his “serious dis-ease.” He describes his steady demise in these terms:

I can see now that my spiritual health was steadily degenerating. I was like a consumptive who, ruddy-cheeked and bright-eyed, looks the picture of health all the time the shadow is darkening across the lung, and like the consumptive I was in a position where any additional strain on powers already weakened could only accelerate my deterioration.⁴⁶

⁴² Ibid. 312.

⁴³ Ibid. 313.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 316.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 318-320.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 322.

One incident that accelerates Darrow's deterioration and signals another breakdown in his intellectual conversion because of his inability to be honest is the meeting he has with Charles Ashworth just before the latter leaves for active duty in World War II. During this encounter, Darrow is haunted by the vision he has had of Charles as a prisoner of war; however, he manages to conceal his dread and hide behind a façade of "indestructible serenity" which, Charles says, gives him confidence to face "anything."⁴⁷

A second incident that weakens Darrow is Anne's explosive outburst after she realizes he's performed an exorcism on Higgins, the farm worker. She identifies his reluctance to face the truth and exclaims:

You won't talk later! You'll sidestep any honest conversation as usual, but has it never occurred to you that I'm beginning to feel bloody well abandoned? I've tried and tried to be a good wife to you, never complaining about all this parish work even though I'm often worn out with the farm; I've stood by you in all your troubles, never offering one word of reproach when you alienate half the village, never uttering a word of complaint when you offend my friends by refusing to accept their invitations, never betraying a hint of what I really feel about this awful alien ritual which completely distorts all our cherished services--⁴⁸

Anne's tirade continues, and Darrow remains "dumbfounded" with his remaining strength "annihilated," but he still proceeds with the massive healing service scheduled for that very day.

After the healing service, his complete mental breakdown, and Anne's miscarriage, Darrow takes a giant step forward in his intellectual conversion when he begins to face the truth about his mother and father and their complex relationship to him. His mother had been bound to him through the psychic powers that they shared; she had vowed she would always be there for him, but she had died of typhoid. Jon was only

⁴⁷ Ibid. 323.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 333.

fourteen at the time, and he was away at school. His father had not sent for him, and Jonathan harbored intense anger toward his father because of this. The loss of his mother produced in Jon an intense fear that any woman he loved would eventually leave him. Meanwhile, his father had always wanted Jonathan to be a replica of himself, an English teacher, or a schoolmaster. When Jonathan was ordained, he thought his father would “discard his mask and roar with rage,”⁴⁹ but he didn’t. Then, when Jon married a working-class girl out of lust, just as his father had done, he did so with great resentment toward his father. Darrow finally faces the truth about his relationship with his father when he confesses to Francis in these terms:

Teach? Good God, no, never! The idea of being a schoolmaster revolted me. That was what *he* wanted and he bloody well had to be disappointed. I felt that if I disappointed him I’d make him angry and if I made him angry the mask would slip and if the mask slipped I’d have a chance to communicate with him, *with him*, my real father, the true self he kept locked up, but no, he wouldn’t share himself with me, he didn’t love me enough because I wasn’t a replica, and so everything was cheating, everything was lies, everything was false, *false*. FALSE from beginning to end.⁵⁰

After this outburst, Darrow finally admits the truth of his situation to himself: “Despite all my charismatic power and my psychic gifts, despite all my confidence and my pride in my ability to heal others, I had always been quite unable to heal myself.”⁵¹

Healing does come eventually, however, in the form of the honesty that develops between Jon and Anne once they have exposed before each other the scars they both have acquired from their intimate relationships in the past.⁵² Healing comes, too, when Jon meets with his son Martin and is made to realize the truth of how he had put the same

⁴⁹ Ibid. 352.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 353.

⁵¹ Ibid. 353.

⁵² Ibid. 378.

pressure on his son to be a replica of himself as his father had placed on him.⁵³ Jon reflects honestly on his own healing in these words:

I could now see how the healing was evolving. Having accepted my mother's death at last, having come to believe myself secure with Anne, I had been ready to hear what Martin had to say and the last piece of the jigsaw had finally fallen into place in my psyche. The light from the north had not, as I had always blithely supposed, been of my new call. The revelation had been of myself, of the dark corners of my soul, and now that this psychological landscape had been illuminated I was at last able to perceive the call which had always existed but which before I had always been too maimed to hear.⁵⁴

This new honest perception of himself enables Jon to relate sincerely to his daughter Ruth, and reconciliation with her follows in the wake of his own healing.⁵⁵ Jon also realizes that he can resume his curacy in the local parish devoid of the strong desire to impose his Anglo-Catholic tendencies, and this pleases his enemy, Archdeacon Aysgarth, as well as his parishioners.⁵⁶ Having arrived at a certain peace regarding his own father and his wishes for him, Jon can now accept his new call to minister as a teacher at the Theological College.⁵⁷ Most important of all, Jon can look forward with hope to the birth of another child when Anne arrives home and gives him the news that she is pregnant once again.⁵⁸

This explication of Jonathan Darrow's intellectual conversion illustrates that the journey is neither quick nor easy, but rather lengthy and difficult, and fraught with twists and turns (i.e., "breakdowns" in Lonergan's terms) that temporarily halt a forward progression. Darrow's intellectual conversion takes another leap forward in the fourth novel of the series, Mystical Paths, which is devoted especially to Nicholas, Darrow's

⁵³ Ibid. 386-389.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 390.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 392.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 394-395.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 397-399.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 405.

youngest son. Toward the end of this novel, Darrow is made to see how he has also wanted his son Nicholas to be a replica of himself. It is only when Darrow admits the erroneous nature of this desire to Nicholas, when he faces the truth about their relationship to each other and to the now deceased Anne, that he makes tremendous strides forward once again in his intellectual conversion.⁵⁹

Before considering the process of Jonathan Darrow's moral conversion, it is important to reiterate Bernard Lonergan's definition of it. According to Lonergan, moral conversion is indicated by a change in the criterion of one's decisions from merely self-satisfaction to values. Satisfactions are agreeable to the person, while values are important in themselves. Values transcend self, while satisfactions do not. In this sense, the valuable can effect good for others, thus indicating moral conversion, while mere satisfactions seek to promote the good for oneself alone and may in this sense signal a breakdown in moral conversion.⁶⁰

Several years before his crisis about whether to remain a monk or not, we meet Jon Darrow in the first novel of the Starbridge series, Glittering Images. He has just been appointed Abbot of the Fordite house at Grantchester after the sudden death of his predecessor, James Reid. His austere demeanor signifies the strength of his moral fiber in the eyes of Charles Ashworth, the Cambridge professor and priest, who describes him in these terms:

He was very tall, even taller than I was, and had a lean but powerful frame. His iron-grey hair was cut very short, his iron-grey eyes saw, I knew, everything there was to see, and the strong striking bone structure of his face was impressive but intimidating in its austerity. It was an irony that the lavish pectoral cross and

⁵⁹ Susan Howatch, Mystical Paths (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1992) 460-471.

⁶⁰ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 240.

heavy ring which symbolized his office succeeded in underlining this austerity rather than negating it.⁶¹

For Charles Ashworth, the evidence of moral conversion appears in the demeanor of Jon Darrow. For the reader, Darrow's subsequent actions of care and concern for the young clergyman substantiate this. Because of his moral strength and his position as Abbot of Grantchester, Darrow becomes the spiritual director to Charles Ashworth. Throughout the remainder of Glittering Images, he gives of himself in accompanying the Cambridge professor through the dark recesses of his troubled soul. In this capacity Darrow transcends himself by acting as a sounding board, a mentor, and a guide for Ashworth on his own tortuous spiritual journey to self-discovery.

Evidence of Darrow's moral conversion is seen principally in his self-sacrificing actions toward Ashworth throughout Glittering Images. For example, when Charles first arrives at Grantchester in a completely debilitated and disheveled state and feeling as if "the demons" are "taking over," Darrow thinks nothing of removing his own pectoral cross and "shoving" it into the weakened man's hand, saying confidently: "The cross bars their path. No demon can withstand the power of Christ."⁶² When Charles confides that he feels as if God has abandoned him, Darrow prays fiercely for him using his powers of clairvoyance unobtrusively that enable Charles to once again feel the Lord's presence.⁶³ During their interviews, Darrow also remains calmly directive without being heavy handed. In one instance, Charles describes Darrow's actions in these words:

On his return he gave me another cross which I could wear instead of his own, and once the Alka-Seltzer had been consumed he produced the book he had brought from the library. It was *Mystics of the Church* by Evelyn Underhill.

⁶¹ Susan Howatch, Glittering Images (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1987) 170.

⁶² Ibid. 199.

⁶³ Ibid. 200.

“This is very light reading for a man of your background,” he said, “and as it was published after you concluded your life as an undergraduate I doubt if you’ve ever troubled to read it. However, a glance at mysticism can often prove to be the shot of oxygen which revives a debilitated theological mountaineer, so if you can’t sleep skim through a chapter or two, and when I return after the office at noon you can tell me whether or not you find the book mildly diverting.”⁶⁴

Because Darrow is already on the path of moral conversion, he can offer himself and his gifts as a healer to Charles without descending into a self-serving, self-satisfying mode of acting. He places value on helping another, not on self-aggrandizement. Charles even says to Darrow: “You’re a healer. You helped me not only by prayer but by channeling power through your hands. That was the charism of healing.”⁶⁵ To these words of praise, Darrow responds humbly:

You’re very flattering...but one could also say you healed yourself by breathing deeply, concentrating your mind on a fixed task and cutting off the supply of adrenalin which was drowning you.⁶⁶

Throughout their lengthy exchanges, Darrow remains the pillar of moral strength as he fulfills his calling to be Charles Ashworth’s spiritual director leading him to greater self-knowledge.

Later, in the third novel of the series, Ultimate Prizes, there is another situation that attests to the moral conversion and strength of Jon Darrow. It occurs when Neville Aysgarth, his former enemy, goes to him after his wife has miscarried and Aysgarth has had to decide to sacrifice their child in order to save her. Aysgarth is beside himself with grief and anger which he has tried to drown by consuming large quantities of alcohol.

⁶⁴ Ibid 202.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 200.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 200.

Darrow seeks to calm him just as he has soothed Ashworth's stricken soul, and the effect is similar. Aysgarth remembers how he felt as a recipient of Darrow's powerful, yet compassionate care:

I blinked rapidly, pretended to rub a fleck of grit from one eye and collapsed yet again at the table. Meanwhile Darrow was moving his chair so that he could sit closer to me. The silence lengthened but eventually I felt strong enough to look at him. He stared back. He had an angular face with prominent cheekbones, a tough jaw and a high forehead. His eyes were a peculiarly clear shade of grey, and I knew, as I noted their clarity, that he was trying to will me into a calmer state...The image of Christ, having drifted so idly into my mind, was now expanding; I found I was thinking of him moving among the sick, the oppressed, the tormented; I imagined him saying: "Your faith has made you whole."⁶⁷

Darrow not only succeeds here in calming Aysgarth almost immediately through the effective and compassionate use of his glamorous powers, he also accompanies him on his sad but necessary journey to see his wife and deceased child and, in addition, he directs him to Aidan Lucas, a monk who can help him make sense of the tragedy that has enveloped him. At one point Aysgarth even describes Darrow as being "like a tank" when he deals with people; one might add that his austerity reveals the strength of Darrow's moral character when he is called upon to help another, even his nemesis Aysgarth, through a major difficulty. Darrow's authoritative actions can be seen in such directives as this one that he gives to Aysgarth:

"Leave everyone to me—I'll deal with them. All you've got to do is deal with yourself by recuperating as far as possible from your sleepless night—and before you try to argue, may I remind you that the care of your health is a religious duty," said Darrow austerely in the kind of voice which made it plain that no further argument was possible.

I saw no alternative but to allow him to lead me from the room.⁶⁸

The strength of Jon Darrow's moral conversion is most evident when he is called upon to

⁶⁷ Susan Howatch, *Ultimate Prizes* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1989) 194.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 195.

come to the aid of another, especially here where his own loss of a pre-term baby parallels Aysgarth's experience. When the overarching value is charitable compassion, Darrow's strong moral character comes to the fore.

One instance, however, in which Darrow's desire to help another person is overshadowed by other less noble motives occurs on his honeymoon with Anne. He realizes that she is thwarted in her ability to express her love totally to him because of the psychological damage inflicted on her by her former fiancé and her father. At this time Darrow ignores Father Darcy's admonition to him to use the charism of healing only for men who seek his counsel and he allows his own desires for his wife to overtake any moral inclinations he might have. As he prepares to lead Anne unknowingly through an exercise that he calls "an experiment," Darrow thinks:

I prayed in words, although the silence in the room remained unbroken, and offering my powers to God I prayed that He might use me as a channel for His Holy Spirit. In an attempt to override all my unsavory motives by an expression of selflessness I also prayed: Let thy will, not mine, be done. But the prayer was a mere formality, no better than the magic incantation of the sorcerer, and the next moment it was *my* will which drove me to take Anne in my arms, *my* will which determined that I should now have what I wanted and *my* will which egged me on to embrace the solution I could no longer withstand.⁶⁹

This constitutes a breakdown in Darrow's moral conversion; he has substituted satisfying himself for the value of helping another compassionately. Fortunately, the effect of this "experiment" is not disastrous; it only moves Anne to expand her demonstration of love for him, to begin sobbing in his arms and then revealing her inmost thoughts.

Another breakdown in Darrow's moral conversion occurs after he has exorcised the demon from the farm-worker, John Higgins, felt the torment of Anne's tirade against him and his glamorous powers, and tries unsuccessfully to pray before the healing service

⁶⁹ Susan Howatch, Glamorous Powers 251-252

in the chapel. His pride overcomes him as the healing of others becomes secondary in his mind. Thus Darrow prays:

Grant me a spectacular cure today so that I can believe my call is right; grant me a spectacular cure so that Anne can admire me again; grant me a spectacular cure so that I can feel young and vital and successful, dazzling not only my wife but the world with my magnificent glamorous powers.

A second later I was recoiling in horror; I had recognized the Devil's presence in this travesty of a prayer, and automatically I grabbed my pectoral cross to beat him out of my psyche. Indeed so appalled was I by this spiritual deviation that it was some time before I could whisper to God: Help me. Give me the strength I must have in order to comfort these sick people. But then I thought of Anne accusing me of being concerned only with my own wants and I realized that even this prayer was hopelessly self-centred.⁷⁰

Once again this breakdown in Darrow's moral conversion is a result of his substituting his own needs for those of others; his own self-satisfaction replaces the value of compassionate caring.

Later, Darrow's moral conversion takes a stride forward when he goes to visit Anne for the first time after her miscarriage. He realizes what concerns her most, and this moves him to regard her needs first. He reflects on this shift in his feelings in these words:

My first visit to Anne was very difficult. During the opening minute I was incoherent and the words of remorse were repeated in a feverish fashion until it dawned on me that Anne was much more concerned about my health than my guilt. Then I realized that I was much more concerned about her own health than about my self-centred need to indulge in an expression of penitence.⁷¹

After engaging in this mutual regard for each other, Darrow can then lead Anne to do what she dreads most, seeing and holding their deceased child. With him as a wounded healer by her side, she can acknowledge the reality of both the birth and death of their baby.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 335-336.

⁷¹ Ibid. 360.

Perhaps the situation that illustrates best the moral conversion of Jon Darrow occurs in the last novel of the series, Absolute Truths, where he compels Charles Ashworth and Neville Aysgarth to confront and to forgive each other and to be reconciled. In this particular scene, Darrow transcends his role as spiritual guide to both men and he becomes a channel through which their relationship to each other is redeemed. When both men go to Jon's cottage seeking guidance, each one volunteers to wait outside until the other has finished receiving counsel. However, Jon assesses their problems and says: "In fact it's not I who have to talk to both of you; it's both of you who have to talk to each other."⁷² He continues to egg their curiosity for each other on by prompting it in words like the following:

You look at each other and see only your faults, but I look at you in the light of my special knowledge and find I can overlook those faults because I know your virtues are far more important. How impressed you would be with each other if you knew what I knew! What heroes you would be in each other's eyes! What a lot you have in common and how you would sympathise with each other if ever you began to discuss your past ordeals! Of course you've both made mistakes and got into muddles from time to time, of course you have—you're only human! But unlike so many people you've always repented and struggled to do better—you've always kept trying, no matter how adverse the circumstances, to live your faith with courage and be the best possible versions of the men God created you to be.⁷³

Despite their reluctance to confide in each other, Darrow continues to prod both Ashworth and Aysgarth until each reveals the truth about himself to the other. Jon does this in an attitude of humility, guiding the men for their own good into a deeper understanding of each other. When Aysgarth chides him for acting like a "mystical seer," which Ashworth contends that he actually is, Darrow answers modestly:

No, certainly I mustn't play the mystical seer and pontificate as if I knew all the answers! When I think back over my past—and about all the mistakes and

⁷² Susan Howatch, Absolute Truths 420.

⁷³ Ibid. 439.

messes *I've* made, most of which you know absolutely nothing about—I can see clearly that I'm even more in need of forgiveness and redemption than you are.⁷⁴

By maintaining the value of helping others humbly, in this case, Ashworth and Aysgarth, to forgive each other and be reconciled, Jon Darrow illustrates the very core of his moral conversion.

Any discussion of the religious conversion of Jon Darrow must begin by acknowledging his call to be a priest in the Church of England. When Darrow first mentions his call, he does so in terms which seem as natural and necessary as being born.⁷⁵ Bernard Lonergan speaks of religious conversion as “a surrender, not as an act, but as a dynamic state that is prior to and principle of subsequent acts.”⁷⁶ Despite the flawed nature of his married life, Darrow's decision to read theology and then to be ordained a priest is this “dynamic state” in which all of his subsequent actions must be viewed. His choice to marry Betty, a “working-class girl” like his mother, may have been partially out of resentment for his father,⁷⁷ but his decision to go to sea involved his honest attempt to save his marriage.⁷⁸ Then, after Betty died, Darrow realized “the full horror of the tragedy.” He confesses to Francis:

She'd died after I'd psychologically abandoned her, and I'd abandoned her for no valid cause. She'd loved me; she'd committed no sin, but I'd made her suffer and suddenly as I saw the exact dimensions of my cruelty I felt unfit to live. That was when the crushing burden descended upon my psyche...My guilt was far deeper than I disclosed to you. It was a huge, crippling, back-breaking guilt, and I carried it with me during all those years I spent as a widower.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Ibid. 442.

⁷⁵ Susan Howatch, *Glamorous Powers* 5. Darrow states very naturally: “I was brought up in a quiet, respectable home, educated at various appropriate establishments and ordained as a clergyman of the Church of England not long after my twenty-third birthday.”

⁷⁶ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 240.

⁷⁷ Susan Howatch, *Glamorous Powers* 353.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 106.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 106-107.

The guilt engendered by Darrow's relationship to his first wife is only surpassed by the guilt he feels regarding his children.⁸⁰ He firmly believes that his call to the cloister, then, is the way he can "live in imitation of Christ and suffer as he suffered on the Cross." He continues to clarify to Francis what he perceived was his call to the Order of the Fordites in these words:

However, there were two aspects of my call to the cloister...The first and most obvious aspect involved this exorcism of the guilt by a spiritual purification. But the second aspect...well, I hardly know how to put this, I feel so embarrassed, but as the years passed and my children flourished, I came to believe that my atonement, my suffering, was somehow enabling them to live free of the shadow of my past sins...I told myself that so long as I remained a good monk God would repay me for my sacrifice by keeping my children safe.⁸¹

Looking back, Darrow acknowledges his pride and arrogance to Francis in believing that he could drive a bargain with God. Still, however misled his secondary motives for remaining in the cloister may seem, they arose from the depths of a soul that initially desired to make amends for past sins.

As a member of the Fordites, Darrow's life is measured by the hours he spends either worshipping God directly or serving others. When his schedule is changed because of his trip to London to see Francis, he reflects on how he usually passes his days:

The Fordites have imprinted their own idiosyncratic stamp on the Divine Office of the Benedictines, merging Terce with Sext and None with Vespers, but several hours of each day are still spent in choir; a monk must never forget that his chief work is to worship God. However beyond the hours of worship lie the hours of service to others, and normally I was heavily occupied not only with looking after my community but with giving counsel to those outside the Order who sought my spiritual direction.⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid. 107.

⁸¹ Ibid. 108.

⁸² Ibid. 46.

Thus as a monk Darrow's time is devoted to God and humanity in a balanced way that gives him little opportunity to engage in self-serving exploits. His religious conversion, in other words, is aided by the Fordite daily rule of life.

Darrow's religious conversion, or as Lonergan says, his "other-worldly falling in love"⁸³ is also enhanced by his mystical view of reality. He tries to explain the vision he has had of her suitcase to Anne in terms of time, and in doing so, he explicates the Neo-Platonic worldview to which he subscribes as a mystic:

The key word is 'moving.' We live in a world of movement, of change, which is reflected in the words 'past,' 'present' and 'future,' but beyond this world is another world to which we're inextricably linked but which we can only dimly perceive. This world is a kingdom of values, the absolute values of Goodness, Truth and Beauty, and it's these unchanging values, present in our changing world of time and space, which reflect the other world, ultimate reality, which is beyond space and time.⁸⁴

Believing in a real world beyond this one enables Darrow to surrender himself not only to the absolute values of Goodness, Truth and Beauty, but ultimately also to God.

"Self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations" is another way in which Lonergan speaks of religious conversion.⁸⁵ In the course of his life as a monk, Darrow is made to surrender his will entirely to that of Father Darcy at certain times⁸⁶ and then to Francis Ingram when he is seeking to discern whether he is being called to leave the Fordites.⁸⁷ This self-surrender to his superiors aids the proud and arrogant Darrow as he progresses in his religious conversion and his surrendering of himself to God's will for him.

⁸³ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 240.

⁸⁴ Susan Howatch, *Glamorous Powers* 171.

⁸⁵ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 240.

⁸⁶ Susan Howatch, *Glamorous Powers* 9-10; 199-200; 257.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 105

There are several moments toward the conclusion of Glamorous Powers when the depth of Jon Darrow's religious conversion is readily apparent. One such instance occurs after his collapse during the healing service, when he has confessed all of his past resentment for his father to Francis. He reflects on his feelings in these words:

There was a large hole where years of hidden grief had been gouged out, and gradually I became aware of Francis's own psyche padding around the gaping hole as delicately as a velvet-pawed cat and patting it gently at the edges to staunch the flow of blood. When he said: "Now at last I see what has to be done," I sensed the presence of the Spirit and knew that by the grace of God I would eventually be healed.

I felt as if God had reached out with a long scythe and slashed my arrogance to shreds.

It was a moment of profoundest humility.⁸⁸

In his moment of greatest weakness and debility, when he is totally dependent on another for solace and on God for healing grace, the religious conversion of Jon Darrow reaches one of its highest points.

Another time when Darrow's religious conversion is most apparent happens when he is holding his dying son Gerald for the first and last time of his very brief life. He is given a vision or a sense of his son dying, and he expresses it in these terms:

There were gates but they were open and as I saw the great darkness which marked the start of the journey I knew at once I had to tell him there was no need to be afraid. "God is love," I said, "and love is stronger than death," but of course I was attempting to reach him with words, impotent inexact useless words, words which he had never had time to learn, and I knew that communication must lie elsewhere. Picking him up I held his minute hand firmly with my thumb and forefinger to tell him he was not alone, and suddenly I felt the flash of psychic recognition as the departing soul, perfectly formed, utterly individual, brushed mine lightly, gratefully, lovingly in the dark.

I cried: "He's alive!" For love is the great reality, and in that moment, the moment of death, he became real to me at last.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Ibid. 353.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 355.

It is at the moment of his son's death that the veil between time and eternity is breached for the mystic Jon Darrow. He tries to express what he knows and senses God to be in order to ward off the fears his tiny son might have as he departs this world. As Lonergan might say, Darrow feels the love of God flooding his heart⁹⁰ and it is this eternal reality he wishes to impart to his dying infant son.

Yet another instance when Darrow's religious conversion, in Lonergan's terms, becomes obvious is when Anne is holding their dead infant son and questioning why he had to die. "Recognizing the call of a soul drowning in the sea of mystery,"⁹¹ as he recalls, Darrow sets out to explain the problem of suffering in a world created and governed by a good God. His theodicy is a valid symbolic expression of Christian mysticism. Darrow speaks of the real world in terms of a circle or cage having two sides, one dark and changing--the world of suffering, and one light--growing and developing and flowering. Both sides of the circle of reality are interdependent; without suffering, in other words, there would be no life, no growth, no development. All of this is an idea in the mind of God, but beyond this circle of reality as we know it is God himself, "the unchanging perfection of ultimate reality." To comfort his wife Anne, Darrow locates his son within this great scheme of God's creating:

Gerald may have slipped out of the cage ahead of us, but that doesn't mean he's ceased to exist. As part of ultimate reality his existence is reflected back into the world of time and space in the form of the absolute values, the values which can never die and the value in which we can most clearly see him reflected is Love.

Love transcends suffering and it's love that gives Gerald's life meaning.⁹²

Darrow then explains to Anne that the wheel of change is still turning and that it is up to

⁹⁰ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 241.

⁹¹ Susan Howatch, *Glamorous Powers* 361.

⁹² *Ibid.* 362.

them to weave the love they have for Gerald into the fabric of their marriage and thus make his short life meaningful in the flowering light of their union. It is because he himself has experienced religious conversion as Lonergan describes it that Darrow, despite his intense grief, can understand the tragic death of his son in terms of God's transforming love.

Yet another time does the religious conversion of Jon Darrow in Lonergan's terms appear most obvious. This occurs when he returns to the chapel after he has collapsed and he has his original vision of the scene replicated in actuality. He kneels in the front pew of the chapel, and, although he is spiritually debilitated because of his recent ordeal, he succeeds in attaining an awareness of God in his absence. He remembers:

The river of consciousness became darker and deeper. I tried to see but my psychic eye was still myopic; closing it again I waited in the dark. God was there, but it was the God of the Neo-Platonists, the God of the Pseudo-Dionysius, the God of John Scotus, above everything, beyond everything, indefinable because any definition would only render Him finite. I knew Him by His absence and by His absence He was there.⁹³

This is the beginning of a mystical state of apprehending God—in his absence, apophatically, without symbols. Although true to the way of the mystics, it does not reflect Lonergan's thought. However, Darrow continues to describe what happens next:

Then I felt His warmth. It was like the sun coming up over the horizon, but although the warmth was very bright it was a brightness which no eye could perceive so I still saw only darkness. The warmth was as paradoxical as the brightness, bracing not enervating [sic], clear and pure as ice in the radiant heat. Yet even as I saw the image of ice I recognised the warmth of life and in the heart of that life was the flame of love. God was here, too, not the God of the Neo-Platonists but the God of Julian of Norwich and Walter Hylton and the unknown author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the God of the joyful, English mystics; personal, loving, immanent, real.⁹⁴

⁹³ Ibid. 381.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 381.

This is the grace to which Lonergan gives the name religious conversion.

After this mystical apprehension of God, Darrow opens his eyes and realizes that he has acquired a knowledge of himself that he never had experienced previously. He sees his life not as isolated segments, one in the monastery and one in the world, but as a unity in which he can now, with “a new freedom,” use the glamorous powers God has given him in service of Him. What Darrow expresses next is exactly the kind of religious conversion described by Lonergan. Darrow relates:

I had a sudden awareness of God’s generosity, and the next moment I was overwhelmed by the boundless and indescribable nature of divine love...I saw Christ crucified, Christ redeemed—and at that moment it was imprinted on my mind that I was finally liberated from all my past guilt. The tide of forgiveness was too strong; no anguish and self-hatred could face it and survive.

I heard Julian of Norwich call across the centuries: “He is Love!” and the darkness blazed with fire.⁹⁵

What Darrow describes here is exactly “God’s love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us”⁹⁶ (Romans 5:5) which Lonergan calls religious conversion.

4.3. Analysis of the Three-Fold Conversion Experience of Neville Aysgarth

When speaking of the three-fold conversion of Neville Aysgarth, that is, of his intellectual, moral, and religious conversion as Lonergan distinguishes them, it is necessary to speak of his ambition to achieve perfection in every area of his life. This character’s drive for the “ultimate prizes,” as Aysgarth calls them, his desire for perfection in everything that is his, in other words, at times clouds his apprehension of

⁹⁵ Ibid. 382.

⁹⁶ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 241.

the truth; therefore, his intellectual conversion is impeded until he can bring himself to abandon his drive for the ultimate prizes and see reality as it truly is.

Aysgarth's initial view of his relationship to his wife Grace and their children is an example of such a delusion. Thus at the beginning of Ultimate Prizes, the third novel of the Starbridge series, he describes his first marriage and family in glorified terms:

At this point I must state unequivocally that Grace was the most wonderful wife for a clergyman and I adored her. I do want to make that absolutely clear. For sixteen years we had enjoyed the most perfect married life without a single cloud marring the marital sky. At least, if I'm to be entirely accurate, I have to admit little wisps of cloud did occasionally appear but they seldom lasted long...

Garnishing my perfect marriage, like gilt lavishly bestowed upon the gingerbread, were my perfect children. I know that as their parent I may be judged hopelessly prejudiced, but people outside the family did constantly comment on my offspring's good looks, good manners, high intelligence and remarkable charm, so I venture to suggest I can't be entirely deluding myself. Needless to say, it was a matter of the very greatest satisfaction to me that I had succeeded in winning two of the ultimate prizes of life: a perfect marriage and a perfect family.⁹⁷

Although this view of his marriage and family is highly inflated, Aysgarth does also admit that his "happy family life had become more than a little frayed at the edges"⁹⁸ when he meets Dido, in May of 1942. He acknowledges, too, the stresses under which his wife Grace is then compelled to work, stresses which include "two active small boys, a newborn baby, a large old fashioned vicarage, unfamiliar surroundings, a host of unknown parishioners and an increasingly elaborate social life." Because of all of this, Aysgarth says that "Grace had slowly sunk into an exhausted melancholy."⁹⁹ Thus at times Aysgarth does acknowledge the truth about his situation, although he demonstrates a state of denial when questioned about it by others.

⁹⁷ Susan Howatch, Ultimate Prizes 20.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 23.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 23.

Alex Jardine, Aysgarth's mentor, for example, tries to warn him both about the dangers of his forming an *amitié amoureuse* with Dido Tallent and about his failing to take measures to relieve the pressures on his wife. Jardine admonishes:

Neville, next time you meet an alluring young woman at a dinner-party, don't disappear into the moonlight with her for more than five minutes. And next time you meet Miss Tallent—if there is a next time—don't disappear with her at all...

My dear Neville, I've been staying here for three days and I'm neither blind nor deaf! It's patently obvious to me that Grace is at the end of her tether!...

Neville, I know you're a proud man, but wouldn't you find it helpful—just for once—to admit that everything in the garden isn't quite as lovely as it ought to be?¹⁰⁰

Instead of heeding Jardine's advice and admitting to the truth, Aysgarth becomes exceedingly angry with him for having meddled in his marriage and he lies "awake fuming for over an hour in the dark."¹⁰¹ Although Aysgarth has already acknowledged to himself the dangers of his forming a relationship with Dido Tallent and the pressures under which his wife is operating, he deludes himself and becomes angry with Jardine for stating the truth about these situations.

Even Grace, Aysgarth's wife, tries to make him see the truth about their marriage. When he accuses her of being obsessed with perfection, she retorts: "*I* obsessed by perfection? But Neville, *you're* the one who's obsessed! You--chasing the prizes of life, never able to rest, never being satisfied—" Aysgarth can't accept this truth, and so he shouts back at Grace, completely denying the reality he is living: "What rubbish—of course I'm satisfied! I've got the perfect wife, the perfect home, the perfect family—I've won all the ultimate prizes of life! Well, nearly all of them—" ¹⁰² Exasperated by his

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 32-33.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 34.

¹⁰² Ibid. 47.

denial, Grace then tries in vain to make Aysgarth understand how she truly feels by saying:

Darling, listen to me...I'm not a prize, I'm a person. I can't just be kept in a glass case on a mantelshelf. I have to move in the real world, and in the real world I can't be this perfect wife of your dreams. I do try to be—I keep trying and trying—I try so hard because I don't want to disappoint you, but—¹⁰³

This discussion follows on the heels of Aysgarth's suggesting that he and Grace go away on a second honeymoon; when she protests, he "rings down the curtain on the scene" and continues to tell her that she's "perfect," thus denying the reality she has just depicted for him.¹⁰⁴

Conducting himself as a person in the process of intellectual conversion, Aysgarth does try to determine honestly why he becomes so infatuated with Dido Tallent. When she appears at Starmouth Court for the weekend, he analyzes his feelings for her truthfully:

It seemed all I now had to do, in order to survive the weekend with my clerical self-esteem intact, was to stick close to my wife and keep my eyes off Dido's legs, which seemed to shimmer like erotic beacons whenever I glanced in her direction. I even thought in a burst of optimism that I might soon be able to write off my embarrassingly carnal preoccupation with Dido as an example of the well-known phenomenon, the middle-aged man's vulnerability to the charms of youth. However, although I was keen to reduce my feelings to a trivial inconvenience, I suspected I was still too young to be in the grip of a middle-aged malaise. Or was I?¹⁰⁵

A short time later, moreover, Aysgarth confronts the truth about his feelings for Dido head-on when he ponders:

I clutched my Bible as if it were a life-belt and forced myself to face the unspeakable. I had fallen in love. Hitherto I had believed that only irrational women could succumb to the full force of an *amour fou*, yet here I was, collapsed into a heap, almost asphyxiated by the reek of red roses, and shivering with desire

¹⁰³ Ibid. 47.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 47.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 67.

from head to toe. This was no middle-aged inconvenience. This was a passion of the prime of life. Nothing like it had ever happened to me before. I was appalled.¹⁰⁶

Because he admits that he has fallen in love with Dido, Aysgarth feels the strong sting of guilt when Grace dies so suddenly and so young. Not only has he contributed to her demise by refusing to acknowledge her weakened state of health, he has also tarnished their love by falling in love with another woman. Even just before she dies, Aysgarth refuses to see the truth about her condition as he cries out to Grace: “*you’re going to live,*” while she dies a minute later.¹⁰⁷

Aysgarth’s journey toward experiencing, understanding, judging, and believing the truth about himself,¹⁰⁸ takes a leap forward just before he marries Dido Tallent. He reflects on the past and the present in these terms:

As the old Neville I could say with perfect truth that Grace had been irreplaceable, but as the new Neville I could talk without difficulty of replacing her.

Then it occurred to me that in fact I was more than two persons. I was the old Neville, the new Neville and the Neville who was now standing outside them both and wondering whether I was demented...And with these three Nevilles all milling around in my consciousness, who on earth was “Neville” anyway?¹⁰⁹

This “morbid introspection,” which Aysgarth describes as being “inexcusable”¹¹⁰ is actually the way of thinking in which he’s led later in the novel; it helps him to unravel some of the mysteries of his complex personality as well as his past and to understand why he acts as he does.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 82-83.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 95.

¹⁰⁸ This is one way in which Lonergan defines intellectual conversion. (Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 240.)

¹⁰⁹ Susan Howatch, Ultimate Prizes 121-122.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 122.

After the miscarriage and the stillbirth of his son, and after he reads Dido's letter professing her love for him, Aysgarth finally realizes the truth of his situation--that he is in a wasteland and that he desperately needs another's help to extricate himself. As he faces this truth, he thinks:

At last it occurred to me that I could not continue to sit at my desk, drink whisky and shudder at the thought of the Fordites. I had to find someone who would tell me how to survive, and when one stood in the wasteland one could hardly afford to be fussy. One just grabbed the best man available and prayed for deliverance. It was then that I remembered Darrow, the former Fordite monk.¹¹¹

It is Darrow, his *bête noire*, who compels Aysgarth not only to visit his wife and to see his dead son, but also to go to London to seek the help of Aidan Lucas, a wise elderly monk from Yorkshire whose background is compatible with that of Aysgarth. Under Lucas' direction Aysgarth reveals his past as he remembers it, but his presentation is like a stylized melodrama that masks deep truths that are inaccessible to him at the time. Lucas listens to Aysgarth's tale,¹¹² calling it a "lovely yarn," and then, after some thought, he offers a metaphorical version of the truth that encompasses all of the "Nevilles" that comprise Aysgarth's fragmented personality.¹¹³ According to Lucas, the truth is multi-faceted and unmistakably interwoven with the personalities that influenced Neville most in the past: his mother, his father, and his Uncle Willoughby. Guiding Aysgarth gently toward the discovery of the truth, Aidan Lucas proposes the following:

If the three Nevilles are reflections of the three vital figures in your past, the way to unite the Nevilles is to harmonise those three figures--
Meaning we must look beyond the melodramatic figures you presented earlier and ask ourselves what these people were really like...All we can assume for certain, given your fragmented warring personality, is that you're not at peace with any of

¹¹¹ Ibid. 185.

¹¹² Ibid. 240-248.

¹¹³ Ibid. 260-266.

these people and that only by understanding them will you be able to forgive them and live in harmony with their memory.¹¹⁴

Lucas also suggests that Aysgarth enlist Jon Darrow's perceptive help in navigating the uncharted waters of his quest for the truth. Giving him hope for his journey, Lucas adds:

I wasn't exaggerating earlier when I said that you'll never be master of your future unless you're master of your past. But once you've mastered your past and are set free to respond to the will of God, then I think all your present problems will prove to be surmountable. I'm not saying you'll fall passionately in love with your wife, but I suspect you'll be granted the grace to achieve a tolerable partnership. It's the only rational assumption to make, isn't it? God would hardly renew your call to serve Him as a churchman and then make no provision to ease your marital dilemma.¹¹⁵

These words not only soothe Aysgarth's troubled soul, they serve to egg him on in search of another ultimate prize, survival. He acknowledges this to Lucas when he says:

What you say makes sense...and I was thinking how clever you were to dredge up some hope for me from such a hopeless situation. I can stand almost anything so long as there's hope. It was the thought of a hopeless marriage, stretching ahead for the next thirty years, that was reducing me to despair...By turning my crisis into a quest capable of resolution, you've performed the miracle of making the future attractive—difficult and challenging, of course, but absorbing and exciting as well.¹¹⁶

So moved is Aysgarth by the help that his visit with Aidan Lucas has given him that he then consents not only to attend the service of "Mass," but also "Prime" with which he is not familiar.

Prompted by Aidan's advice that he must discover the truth about his mother, his father, and his Uncle Willoughby, those people who shaped his past, Aysgarth travels to visit his sister Emily and his brother Willy. They reveal still other perceptions of these three persons, a fact which substantiates Aidan's view that the truth is multi-faceted and

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 264.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 270.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 270.

difficult to ascertain. Accordingly, Emily perceives their mother as having been the tragic victim, their father as the villain, and Uncle Willoughby as the hero.¹¹⁷ Willy, on the other hand, understands their mother to be a frightful monster like Lady Macbeth, their father to be a tragic, romantic intellectual like Hamlet, and Uncle Willoughby, a buffoon or a rogue with a witty streak like Falstaff.¹¹⁸ These views collide with those of Aysgarth himself who believes their mother was a *femme fatale*,¹¹⁹ their father, a melancholy mystic who was unsuccessful at business, and Uncle Willoughby, a villain.¹²⁰ When he relates his findings to Darrow, who is helping him navigate these mysterious waters of his past, Aysgarth admits: “Everything Emily and Willy said was true—and yet at the same time everything they said was false.”¹²¹ Darrow then applauds Aysgarth’s realization by saying: “But that’s good—we’re now in what Aidan calls the land of paradox, and that means we’re very close to the truth.”¹²²

In order to come to know and understand the real truth about his mother, his father, and his Uncle Willoughby, Aysgarth must go to visit the one person of that generation who is still alive, his uncle. However, he is haunted by the remembrance of their last meeting in which he believes a “violent demon” was released in him, after which a horrible physical confrontation ensued. In order for him to embark on this last quest in search of the truth, Aysgarth must be prodded by Darrow with these strong words:

We all have our demons which have to be fought and vanquished. But the way to vanquish them is not to let them crowd you into such a tight corner that all you

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 278-283

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 289-291.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 374.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 241-243.

¹²¹ Ibid. 372.

¹²² Ibid. 372.

can do is crouch down and shudder with fear. You've got to straighten your back, beat your demons to pulp and march to freedom over their corpses.

Think of the father who loved you, Aysgarth! Don't you owe it to him to find out exactly how he died? And think of Professor Raven talking of unity! Do you really want to spend the rest of your life as a collection of warring fragments?¹²³

So Aysgarth sets out to visit Uncle Willoughby to find out the truth from his perspective and especially to learn how his father died. To Aysgarth's surprise, Uncle Willoughby receives him as the Prodigal Son, opening a bottle of the best champagne and telling him all he can about the past.¹²⁴ What Uncle Willoughby reveals to Aysgarth allows him to finally admit the truth about his mother: he actually hated her because she withheld her love from him, especially after the death of his father.¹²⁵

Uncle Willoughby had also instructed the young Aysgarth in what winning the prizes means. After his visit to his uncle, he confesses to Darrow:

The prizes consisted of winning the attention of the people who mattered, and the ultimate prizes consisted of winning their love and approval. Father, Mother, Uncle Willoughby...they all offered prizes, but Mother's ultimate prize, her love and approval, was the most fascinating—the most enslaving prize of all. Those visits to the parlour for the daily kiss, those occasional pats on the head, those rare smiles...Whenever I won a smile I felt fit to burst with pride. Ah, what a chase it was for that prize, so addictive, so compulsive, so endlessly exciting.¹²⁶

After his father's death, however, because of her guilt-ridden grief, Aysgarth's mother ceases to give him any signs of affection, and so he not only develops hatred for her, but for any woman who isn't "normal" or a "devoted wife and mother."¹²⁷ He recalls how "up at Oxford" when he "lost his virginity" he "started to beat the woman up afterwards."

In Darrow's presence, he continues to remember:

¹²³ Ibid. 382.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 388-403.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 407.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 407.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 409.

I thought: *There's* a demon who has to be locked up. So for years I drank very sparingly and I became a clergyman, keeping my demon clamped down beneath a clerical collar, and I married a wife whom I could put on a pedestal and revere...She was safe there, you see, up on her pedestal, the perfect marital prize. I couldn't have harmed her there...Oh, how hard I worked to sew up my demon in a straitjacket so that I'd feel safe, and in the end I did feel safe, I thought I'd mastered him, I thought I had everything under control.¹²⁸

Aysgarth's demon remains fettered until one day when his mother is living with him and an insidious quarrel arises between them. Then Aysgarth begins to beat her, and he does not stop until his wife prevails upon him.¹²⁹ Afterward, Aysgarth treats this incident as though it never happened; in a sense he denies the truth and he succeeds in doing this until his mother dies. Finally, he tells Darrow what happened to him after his mother's death:

I became aware that a black hole had opened up in my life, a gnawing emptiness which was stealthily expanding...It was the addict's deprivation.

All my life, in one way or another, I'd been bound up with my great prize, and now she was gone I found I didn't know what to do without her. I forgot the nightmare scene in 1938, blotted it right out. All I could remember was the thrill of the chase, the thrill which made me feel so powerfully alive—and then it occurred to me that if only I could embark on another delirious chase I could keep the horror perpetually at bay.¹³⁰

Then, as Aysgarth recounts, he met Dido, and “the demented addict had at last found a new supply of dope.”¹³¹ All he needed was the freedom to chase her, and with Grace's death, he was granted this.

After Aysgarth acknowledges the ultimate truth about his present life with Dido and how it mirrors the past with his mother, Darrow ministers to him by telling him that he has repented and is forgiven.¹³² More important than this, however, is the fact that

¹²⁸ Ibid. 409-410.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 410-411.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 412.

¹³¹ Ibid. 412.

¹³² Ibid. 413-414.

now he can understand that his mother, his father, and his Uncle Willoughby were “just three ordinary people who got in a mess and wound up in a tragedy.”¹³³ This leads Aysgarth finally to forgive all three of them and to be able to now concentrate on the present with his wife Dido and his future in the church. Having discovered and confronted the truth about his past, or in Lonergan’s terms, having experienced, understood, judged and believed the truth, Aysgarth can move forward in his process of intellectual conversion.

If Lonergan’s definition of moral conversion is “dealing with changing the criterion of one’s decisions from satisfactions to values,”¹³⁴ then in speaking of the moral conversion of Neville Aysgarth, one must begin with the values he himself holds. At the beginning of the novel Ultimate Prizes, Aysgarth expresses his views on several moral issues; he characterizes these views as being “old-fashioned.” Thus he states unequivocally:

I believe fornication is degrading to women, who should be treated with the utmost reverence as befits their unique contribution to humanity as wives and mothers. Adultery I look upon not merely as a moral error but as a crime, breaking sacred promises, destroying trust, poisoning love, wrecking lives not only of the guilty but of the innocent.

My strict attitude to sexual license extends to the human race’s other pastime which causes so much trouble: drink. The Primitive Methodists of my childhood used to thunder away on that subject with as much verve as they devoted to sexual immorality, so it is hardly surprising that I became a most abstemious young man.¹³⁵

¹³³ Ibid. 415.

¹³⁴ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 240.

¹³⁵ Susan Howatch, Ultimate Prizes 18-19.

Despite these avowals, Aysgarth experiences breakdowns in his moral conversion precisely with regard to sexual morality and alcoholism. First, he falls in love with Dido Tallent while he is still married to Grace,¹³⁶ and although he is not physically intimate with her, he does agree to be her spiritual guide and carry on a continuing correspondence with her.¹³⁷ Secondly, shortly after his unsuccessful honeymoon and after Alex Jardine's funeral, when he is alone with Lyle Ashworth in the Jardine kitchen, not only does Aysgarth consume three whiskies and soda,¹³⁸ he also is physically intimate with Lyle. When he acknowledges to himself that only the Scotch saved him from the ultimate indiscretion, he also remembers:

Rolling away from Lyle I slammed into one of the table legs and in a strange gesture thumped the floor very hard three times with my clenched fist. Perhaps I was trying to channel the anger out of my body, the anger with Dido for humiliating me, the anger with Lyle for pretending I was someone else, the anger with myself for violating the moral code which I had long since vowed to uphold. I felt I wanted to go on the rampage, breaking crockery, smashing windows, even picking a fight and beating someone up. The violence of my anger frightened me, and in my fear I at last regained my self-control.¹³⁹

In order that he may pretend that adultery didn't take place, and so "ring down the curtain" and forget what has happened, Aysgarth falls back on the "Law of England" which maintains that there's "no adultery without penetration."¹⁴⁰ This is part of the reason why Aysgarth holds back in his adulterous relationship with Venetia Flaxton throughout the novel Scandalous Risks.¹⁴¹ He deludes himself into thinking that adultery requires penetration, not simply physical and emotional involvement, which he enjoys

¹³⁶ Ibid. 83.

¹³⁷ Ibid. 41.

¹³⁸ Ibid. 145.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 150-151.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 151.

¹⁴¹ Susan Howatch, Scandalous Risks (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1990) 432. Any doubt about whether Aysgarth and Venetia's relationship was ever consummated is averted by Venetia's confession to Lyle at this point in the novel.

with Venetia. In that situation, he also mistakenly believes that he has not abandoned his moral code.

Aysgarth's relationship with Venetia that constitutes almost the entire plot of Scandalous Risks, the fourth novel of the series, demonstrates yet another breakdown in his moral conversion. While he abstains from engaging in sexual intercourse with this young woman, he, nevertheless, leads her on to fantasize about their union, and eventually to suffer tremendously when their liaison must come to an end. During the course of their relationship, Venetia typically daydreams:

The Dean of Starbridge! And *me*! Carefully I drew a little heart, pierced it with a delicately etched arrow and wrote VENETIA at one end and NNA at the other. Never before had so trivial a doodle afforded me such immense satisfaction, and as I contemplated those magic initials my excitement reached new heights. Never mind that he had a wife. Never mind that he was a clergyman, a fact which prohibited anything so unspiritual as a full-scale adulterous love-affair. At least--thanks to Bishop Robinson¹⁴²--we could indulge in a high-minded love, a romantic self-denial and countless erotic meetings.¹⁴³

During the entire course of their unconsummated affair, Aysgarth continues to delude himself and Venetia into thinking that they are acting morally. Finally toward the end of the novel, the young woman has a mental breakdown precipitated by Aysgarth's indulgence in self-satisfaction, his moral breakdown in Lonergan's terms.

At one point in his process of moral conversion, however, Aysgarth does admit to himself what really happened between Lyle Ashworth and himself. He recalls Aidan's advice to him, that he should re-examine the past and "face the pain." He remembers that a year ago he had "almost" committed adultery. He continues to reflect:

It was strange how that insipid little word "almost" now had such an unmistakably sinister ring. A year ago I had almost committed adultery...I could

¹⁴² Venetia alludes to Bishop John A. T. Robinson, author of Honest to God and Aysgarth's hero, who advocates the liberal standards of situation ethics and morality based on love alone.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 171

imagine myself saying that to Aidan, and all too easily I could imagine Aidan replying: “Almost? No, that’s not quite right, Neville, is it...”

I shuddered. Then I told myself that now was hardly the moment to remember that the legal and spiritual definitions of adultery didn’t entirely coincide. I had to survive, not drive myself round the bend with unbearable thoughts.¹⁴⁴

At least here Aysgarth indicates that he values the standards of Christianity regarding adultery, although he has not acted within their parameters.¹⁴⁵

Aysgarth’s moral conversion progresses further during his involvement with the German prisoners of war in the camp on Starbury Plain. At first, berating himself for his lack of pastoral gifts as he begins his ministry among the Germans, Aysgarth recalls:

I hated it. I did my best, but my best seemed abysmal, and I found it hard to bear the humiliation of having my weakness for pastoral work so brutally exposed...it no longer mattered that I was a successful archdeacon, because now I was in a situation which required a missionary, someone with the guts to fight for Christianity right in the front line. There were times at the beginning when I used to be physically sick before I visited the camp. Could any reaction have been more cowardly and inadequate? I despised myself. Later I fought off the nausea but used to shiver from head to toe. Revolting! I continued to despise myself.¹⁴⁶

When Aysgarth first begins his ministry on Starbury Plain, he worries only about himself and his inability to care pastorally for the Germans. However, once he becomes involved with the men personally, signified by his relationship with Eddie Hoffenberg, one of the prisoners, he forgets himself and finds the strength to say and do things he never thought imaginable. At first in answer to Hoffenberg’s questioning the horrors of being “locked up indefinitely...cut off from one’s loved ones...hated and despised by one’s jailors—how does one go on believing in God in a world where God is absent?” Aysgarth can only hold up one man, George Bell, the Bishop of Chichester.¹⁴⁷ He tells Hoffenberg

¹⁴⁴ Susan Howatch, Ultimate Prizes 284-285.

¹⁴⁵ “Deciding is one thing, doing is another,” writes Lonergan of someone who is morally converted. (Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 240.)

¹⁴⁶ Susan Howatch, Ultimate Prizes 113.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 285.

how Bell stood up in the House of Lords and condemned the government's policy of saturation bombing. As a result Bell becomes a hero not only for the German soldiers, but also for Aysgarth himself because he is not afraid to put his career possibilities on the line in order to uphold his principles. He reminds the nation over and over again of the Germany behind the swastikas, "the Germany of the persecuted, the suffering and the innocent." Bell becomes Aysgarth's hero for several reasons. As he says to Grace: "George Bell's out there in the chaos, battling away doggedly for God in a world gone mad."¹⁴⁸ Later in the novel he expresses his admiration for Bell because he "was doggedly anti-Nazi, but no one was more mindful that not all Germans were Nazis and that Nazism itself was transcended by the brotherhood of man."¹⁴⁹

Still, although the German prisoners come to know of Bishop Bell, in reality they have only Aysgarth who ministers to them. This he does admirably—offering frequent services that are acceptable to them and refreshing his knowledge of German in order to deliver a short sermon to the prisoners in their native tongue.¹⁵⁰ When Bishop Bell comes to see him because the German prisoners have written a letter of commendation for him, Aysgarth remains self-deprecating, although he does acknowledge his powerful ministry of presence. He says to Bishop Bell:

But don't think I was a wonder-worker. I wasn't. In fact I think I was probably absolutely useless. But perhaps all that mattered was that I was there, a symbolic presence in their macabre psychiatric hell—oh, what grueling work it was, terrible, so harrowing, and all the time I was more conscious than ever of my painful shortcomings as a clergyman.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 69.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 115.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 316.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 317.

What bothers Aysgarth most is the fact that he has kept his ministry to the Germans a secret lest his career should be jeopardized. However, maintaining that actions speak louder than words, Bishop Bell relies on the testimony of the German soldiers themselves who have nothing but praise and admiration for Aysgarth. In their letter they express their feelings about him to Bishop Bell, telling him that through his presence among them Aysgarth has transported the crucified Christ into the horrible circumstances of their imprisonment.¹⁵² In spite of his shortcomings, then, Aysgarth embodies the compassionate Christ for the Germans. His preoccupation with himself is thus transcended by the value of Christian charity, an indication of his moral conversion.¹⁵³

Aysgarth's religious conversion, or his "being grasped by ultimate concern," as Lonergan defines it,¹⁵⁴ must be viewed against the backdrop of his initial call to the priesthood. As he recounts his past life to Aidan Lucas, he remembers that the moment of his call was not a "gradual evolution" but rather a "road-to-Damascus call, the blinding light coming out of the blue."¹⁵⁵ Unlike St. Paul, however, Aysgarth doesn't see Christ at first; instead he is seated before Charles Raven as he preaches a sermon in Christ Church Cathedral. He tells Lucas about Raven:

He was talking of the principle of evolution in nature and applying it to the evolution of mankind towards the Kingdom of God, when all of a sudden he stopped in mid-sentence. He flung out his arms... and he appeared to look straight at me with those brilliant eyes of his and he cried: 'It's all a unity! It's all one!' And then I saw the light which had shone on St. Paul.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² See Chapter One, page 40 for the quotation about Aysgarth contained in the letter of commendation written by Eddie Hoffenberg for all the German prisoners of war.

¹⁵³ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 38. Here Lonergan states that the judgment of value itself thrusts one toward moral self-transcendence.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 240.

¹⁵⁵ Susan Howatch, *Ultimate Prizes* 244.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 244-245.

Charles Raven's words jog Aysgarth to remember his father and the long walks he would take with his sons in the Yorkshire hills. On those walks Aysgarth's father would echo what Raven preached with these words:

Look at the wildflowers!...Look at the birds! And look how even the town looks beautiful from a distance, blending into the background of the hills...It's all a unity, you see. The things that we can touch—the landscape, the flowers, the animals—and the things which we can only hold in our minds—Beauty, Truth and Goodness—they're all manifestations of God, all a unity, all one.¹⁵⁷

Aysgarth considers that his father might have been a pantheist, but more likely he merely “possessed to an intense degree what Rudolf Otto called *Das Heilige*, a sense of the holy.”¹⁵⁸ As a child, then, Aysgarth received his first perspective on God from his father and it is this viewpoint that is revived in him when he discerns his call to be a priest.

The moment of his call to the priesthood signifies for Aysgarth not only a step along the way of his religious conversion, but also a psychological step back to the personal identity he wants to re-claim as his own, the identity he received from his father.

As he tells Lucas:

The world—the world of Neville Two—Uncle Willoughby's world—ground to a halt. I was back on the moors again as Neville One and my father was there with me—I could actually see him—and Christ was there too, I knew he was—there on the Maltby moors, there in Christ Church Cathedral, there standing shoulder to shoulder with Charles Raven, and it was all a unity, all one—and then as I experienced that unity, Uncle Willoughby's world was rent from top to bottom, like the curtain in the temple when Christ was crucified, and I saw the way back at last into that paradise which had been lost.¹⁵⁹

This telescopic view of the past and the present and of his distinct personalities nurtured by both his father and his uncle together with the intervening figure of Christ solidifies the sense of call to the priesthood that the young Aysgarth experiences. It is so strong

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 139.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 242.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 245.

that it gives Aysgarth the strength not only to pursue his call but also to stand up to his Uncle Willoughby when he announces to him his decision to become a priest. This is the “ultimate concern” which “grasps” Aysgarth and that forms the basis of his religious conversion.

An analysis of Aysgarth’s religious conversion must also take into consideration his theological stance as a Low Church Liberal Protestant Modernist. In a letter to Dido Tallent early in the novel Ultimate Prizes,¹⁶⁰ he spells out what he means by these terms. Classifying himself as a “Low Churchman,” Aysgarth professes that he plays down the importance of the Liturgy, unlike the Anglo-Catholics, and plays up the importance of the Bible and the sermon in worship. On the other hand, unlike some Non-Conformist Low Church sects in England, he does not “believe every word of the Bible to be literally true”; instead Aysgarth holds that religion must be “compatible with the best modern scholarship.”¹⁶¹

As a Liberal Protestant, Aysgarth stands in opposition to the neo-orthodox school and its “theology of Crisis.” As he writes in his letter to Dido:

It [the “theology of Crisis”] emphasises mankind’s sin and misery and says that God isn’t immanent but utterly transcendent, quite unknowable by man. Meanwhile, the role of Christ is played down; he merely becomes a salvation event... Instead of the forgiveness and compassion of Christ we’re offered the judgement and punishment of God; instead of the Christian message of hope we’re offered a vision of hell and despair.¹⁶²

Aysgarth does not subscribe to this grim theological perspective; rather as a Liberal Protestant born of “enlightened Victorians,” Aysgarth professes these optimistic beliefs:

I believe (and this belief chimes with Darwin’s work) that the world is evolving steadily in accordance with God’s purpose for mankind, a purpose which is

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 56-58.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 57.

¹⁶² Ibid. 58.

fundamentally good and benign. I believe that sin and evil aren't as important as man's basic goodness, the goodness which is exemplified for all time by Our Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that God is immanent in this world and that the Holy Spirit is present as a spark in every member of mankind.¹⁶³

Aysgarth's Liberal Protestantism is linked also with his Modernism. As a Modernist, he believes in "reinterpreting Christianity in the light of modern knowledge." Therefore, all fields of endeavor—from geology to psychology to physics—may be used, as he says, "as a springboard to an expanded spiritual enlightenment." Unlike some "eccentric crackpots, who give the movement a bad name," as a Modernist Aysgarth still maintains the following:

All genuine Modernists...hold fast to the Divinity of Christ, the Resurrection and the concept of Eternal Life...But exactly how Jesus was the Son of God and in what manner he was resurrected and in what sense one is to interpret "Eternal Life"—these are questions which the Modernists hold are open to constant revision in the light of modern knowledge.¹⁶⁴

His optimistic view of humankind evolving steadily toward good and his denial of the deleterious effects of sin and evil in the process together with his belief that God exists in every human being "as a spark" allow Aysgarth to see himself as an agent who is capable of discerning his good ends all on his own. Precisely because of his Low Church view which opposes auricular confession and also the need for a constant spiritual director, Aysgarth finds himself alone facing the most difficult crises of his life. Lacking someone to hold him accountable, Aysgarth embarks on his journey toward religious conversion that is precarious at best.

However, it is precisely at the times when Aysgarth feels utterly alone in his "wasteland," as he calls it, that he is moved to seek the help of another in order to

¹⁶³ Ibid. 58.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 57.

alleviate his suffering. One such time occurs after the stillborn death of his and Dido's first son. It is then that Aysgarth's Liberal optimistic theology fails him. He reflects on his situation:

The sword of my Liberal optimism had shattered. I had thought the horrors of the atomic bomb and the concentration camps had already tried my Liberalism to its limits, but it had survived by insisting that these evils had been an aberration in mankind's steady evolution in accordance with God's plans. I had of course been aware that I stood at a privileged distance from those who had suffered so grossly in the war, but I had told myself that this gave me the necessary detachment to squeeze the horrors into my theory of atonement: God had achieved at-one-ment, putting himself at one with suffering humanity through the sufferings of Christ so that all evil might be overcome and mankind made whole, reconciled and redeemed by God's love. It had never occurred to me that I could find myself in a situation where God appeared to be not at one with mankind at all but utterly absent, utterly remote and utterly transcendent.

But now God was in his heaven, I was in hell and there was no at-one-ment, no sign of Christ.¹⁶⁵

When his Liberal theology fails him, and he senses the absence of God, Aysgarth is moved to seek the help of a companion to guide him out of his wasteland. Ironically, it is Jon Darrow's help that Aysgarth elicits. Thus it is Darrow, his enemy, who leads and accompanies Aysgarth to face his aggrieved convalescing wife, and Darrow, too, who insists that Aysgarth see his deceased child. Because of Darrow's direct yet compassionate ministry of presence to him, and because of Aysgarth's surrendering himself to Darrow's guidance, Aysgarth gradually begins to claw his way out of his wasteland.

It is important to emphasize that it is at Darrow's insistence that Aysgarth chooses to see his deceased child. The older man knows from experience how enlightening a

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 183-184.

moment this can be.¹⁶⁶ During this encounter, Aysgarth's religious conversion progresses in a distinct fashion. At first, he has difficulty even praying; he mistakenly begins to say the Lord's Prayer, for example, and concludes it instead with the General Confession. Trying to remain in control of the situation, he expresses what he wishes he could do: "In despair I wished I could sense the presence of Christ. Then I would be in command, infused by the power of the Spirit, and all would be well."¹⁶⁷ It is noteworthy, too, that when Aysgarth surrenders himself to the experience instead of trying to control it, he senses the presence of God once again. As he holds the corpse of his child, he ponders:

I thought of him being "with Christ,"...in some dimension of ultimate reality which lay far beyond the scope of human imagination to conceive, and suddenly I saw Jesus clearly in my mind, not the effeminate romantic of those sentimental Victorian paintings and not the magnetic leader I usually pictured, but an idealistic version of my father, who had loved children and who had transformed the bleak hills above Maltby into a paradise when he had taken us for walks on those summer afternoons long ago. And when I glanced down again at the corpse I saw it was no longer just a dead body but a person—and not just any person but someone special, as special as all the other grandchildren whom my father would have loved if only he could have lived to see them, and as I remembered my father's love the vile repulsive room became suffused with light, my despair was smoothed away and for a single moment my wasteland was transformed, just as the Yorkshire countryside had been transformed long ago when my father had been alive and I had walked with him in paradise.¹⁶⁸

At Darrow's behest, Aysgarth places himself in a position to have an extraordinary experience of God. This surrendering of himself to Darrow's will for him allows

¹⁶⁶ See pages 174-175 of this chapter for the powerful effect that holding his dying infant son has on Darrow.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 202.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 202-203.

Aysgarth to surrender himself also to the situation in which he is holding his dead son. It is this latter surrender which brings about a deepening of Aysgarth's religious conversion as Bernard Lonergan describes it.¹⁶⁹

Aysgarth surrenders himself to Aidan Lucas's direction, too, when he later recounts his life to him and faces his sin and guilt with regard to Grace, his first wife. Once again, the horror of what he has done catapults him into his wasteland. He remembers:

All I knew was that the wasteland had suddenly become pitch dark. I covered my face with my hands as if I could protect myself from the horror I could not name, but as the tears streamed past my fingers I realized what had happened. I had been almost annihilated by the pain I had just faced. I thought of my Grace, that innocent victim who had been so wounded by my infidelity that she had been drained of the will to live, and at last the river of guilt which I had suppressed for so long burst its banks. In the flood that followed, Christ was absent, God had turned His face, and I felt I could only drown in my grief and my shame.¹⁷⁰

This is the nadir of Aysgarth's sin and guilt and it is here that he feels the utter absence of God. Being so drastically vulnerable in the presence of Lucas, he can then surrender himself to the religious experience that ensues. He describes it in these terms:

Then someone sat down on the bed beside me; someone stepped into my wasteland to share my agony; someone made the darkness endurable. Automatically I reached out for his hand. It was there, waiting, and as his fingers closed on mine I knew that Christ, the resurrected Christ, not the Jesus of history but the Christ of Eternity, had moved through the closed door of the room to be again at one with his disciples. He was contained in the compassion which now encircled me and in the sharing of the suffering. My tears ceased. My pain eased, A great stillness seemed to blend with the silence.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 240-241. Lonergan characterizes religious conversion as "a total and permanent surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations...It is revealed in retrospect as an under-tow of existential consciousness, as a fated acceptance of a vocation to holiness, as perhaps an increasing simplicity and passivity in prayer..." This captures Aysgarth's experience as he holds the corpse of his son.

¹⁷⁰ Susan Howatch, *Ultimate Prizes* 257.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* 257.

Although Aysgarth does not consult a spiritual director regularly, when he is in his wasteland and turns to another for compassion, counsel, and support, he undergoes an experience akin to what Lonergan calls “God’s love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us,”¹⁷² or religious conversion.

There are at least two other instances when Aysgarth reveals the depth of his religious conversion. Both of them occur at moments when he moves toward reconciliation with two people with whom he has been at odds. The first involves Charles Ashworth. Toward the end of the last novel of the series, Absolute Truths, Aysgarth confesses to Ashworth his involvement in a shady fund-raising scheme. His reason for devising this plan has to do with the avowed purpose of his life, taking care of his second wife Dido. Aysgarth tells Charles why this has become his sole purpose in life:

A long time ago...I did a great wrong to a woman who loved me, and later, at the beginning of my second marriage, I came to understand that by never treating Dido as I’d treated that other woman, I could put everything right. It was atonement—redemption—insanity—call it what you like, but it enabled me to be at peace with myself and continue my work as a clergyman.¹⁷³

With the goal in mind of keeping Dido financially stable, Aysgarth has embarked on what he admits is a “shady, shifty, reckless and scandalous” scheme in which he characterizes himself as being “a rogue, a spiv, a wheeler-dealer and a sharp-shooter who’s utterly unfit to be a clergyman.”¹⁷⁴ Because of his blatant confession, Aysgarth expects harsh judgment of him and his scheme. Instead, Ashworth merely says: “Judge not, that ye be not judged,”¹⁷⁵ and reconciliation between the two men ensues.

¹⁷² Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 241.

¹⁷³ Susan Howatch, Absolute Truths (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1994) 576.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 586.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 586.

The other person with whom Aysgarth seeks reconciliation before he dies is Venetia Flaxton. He realizes that their affair ruined her, so when he understands that he is near death, Aysgarth goes to see her, as he says, “to put right the great wrong that I’ve done.”¹⁷⁶ Aysgarth tries to make Venetia understand the core belief that he himself has experienced as religious conversion. He realizes the depth of her pain so he says to Venetia:

You’re saying you’re estranged from God. You’re saying you’re alienated in the wasteland. But that’s the tragedy of mankind which lies at the heart not only of the doctrine of atonement but the doctrine of the Incarnation...

I’ll give you an example...an example of the principle of atonement in action, of the spirit of the Incarnation still ceaselessly on the move, of how pain and alienation and estrangement, no matter how deep, can be transmuted and healed by the power of love—which is the power of God. I wanted to put things right between us. I came here out of love, and when you saw me you knew that. Then you didn’t just open the door and say hullo. You opened the door and you smiled and you ran down the steps and you took me in your arms and you hugged me—and the demons of alienation and estrangement were vanquished at last because love and your response cast them out.”¹⁷⁷

In the throes of reconciliation once again, Aysgarth expresses the depth of his religious conversion which is based in the forgiving and atoning love of God.

4.4. Analysis of the Three-Fold Conversion Experience of Charles

Ashworth

Any discussion of the intellectual conversion of Charles Ashworth must center around his acknowledgment in 1937 of the existence of the “glittering image” that peers back at him when he gazes in a mirror and his true self that he is hiding beneath it.

¹⁷⁶ Susan Howatch, Scandalous Risks 456.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 458.

Indeed, the relationships he forges in the beginning of the novel Glittering Images all involve this perfect rendition of himself instead of his genuine personality. At the beginning of this novel, Charles has been summoned by Archbishop Lang to unravel the mystery taking place in the palace of the Bishop of Starbridge. Ironically, however, the real mystery lies within Charles himself, and Lyle Christie points this out when she challenges him early in the novel with these words:

I'm beginning to think *you're* the real mystery here, Charles Ashworth, with your interest in the Bishop and your Don Juan manners and the wife you won't talk about and the past you gloss over so smoothly! Why are you going through this elaborate charade of making torrid passes at me?¹⁷⁸

Lyle thus characterizes the path that Ashworth's intellectual conversion will take. In Bernard Lonergan's terms, it involves his search and discovery of the truth first about himself and then about the relationships he has with his own father and mother, with Bishop Jardine, with his first wife Jane, and with Lyle herself.

Ashworth embarks on his search for the truth under the able spiritual direction of Jon Darrow. During one of their earlier conversations, Darrow defines success for Charles in what he calls "non-theological terms." Thus he says to the younger man: "...success involves realizing the fullest potential for good of one's true self so that one's life is a harmonious expression of one's innate gifts."¹⁷⁹ Darrow then asks Ashworth to define failure, and he responds with these words:

Locking up one's true self in order to live a lie...living out of harmony with one's true self in order to pursue the wrong goals for the wrong reasons. Caring more about other people's opinions than about serving God and doing His will.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Susan Howatch, Glittering Images 85.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 236.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

As Darrow explains, Ashworth has become so addicted to being liked and receiving approval that he has allowed his glittering image to replace his true self in his relationships with other people. Discovering the reason why he has done this compels Ashworth to return to his parents' home, in other words, to his roots. Once there, he begins to unravel the mystery of why, for instance, he can believe that his father is "so straight, so upright, so decent" and even "a hero," while Darrow can see the deleterious effects the elder Ashworth has had on his son. He tries to make Charles understand this when he says:

Charles,...your father may indeed be a remarkable man in many ways, but if he's at the root of your glittering image—if he consistently rejected your true self so that you were obliged to become someone else—if he was in any degree responsible for launching you on that road which finally resulted in you arriving here one night dead drunk and spiritually shattered—his status as a hero is very much open to debate.¹⁸¹

It isn't until Charles confronts his father about the facts concerning his paternity that he sees him for what he is, "an actor" who "remove[s] his mask at the end of some long Greek tragedy...slowly, very slowly, like the old man he was."¹⁸²

After Charles learns that his biological father is Dr. Alan Romaine, he returns to Darrow who encourages him to meet his progenitor. Not only does Charles learn the truth about the past from his real father's perspective, he must also somehow come to forgive Romaine for what he has done and not done for him. Charles is spiritually and emotionally unhinged after he confronts Romaine for the first time, and he thinks:

Gripping my cross I tried to pray, but I was too upset. I wanted only to wipe Romaine from my mind, but there he was, imprinted for ever, a smooth, tough, wily old survivor who apparently knew exactly how to tug at my heart-strings. I thought of his valiant effort to gloss over his touching offer of champagne; I thought of his brave attempt to hide his distress when he realized I was

¹⁸¹ Ibid. 254.

¹⁸² Ibid. 297.

determined not to shake his hand; I thought of his pathetic panic when he realized he had aroused my animosity, and I felt that my equilibrium, so painfully acquired at Grantchester, had been demolished. I could cope with his charming mask merely by disliking it, but the pathos beyond defeated me. I felt threatened by it. I was quite prepared to work out an intellectual formula for forgiveness which would put my beleaguered psyche at rest while enabling me to be a good Christian, but I did not want my emotions involved. My instinct was to lash out, push him away.¹⁸³

It takes an exchange of letters and an entire day spent together in Cambridge for Charles to accept Romaine as the biological father that he is and the friend he gradually becomes. In his wisdom Romaine eventually speaks to Charles about the relationship they share in these realistic terms:

After all, God must have brought us together for a purpose, mustn't He, and if He'd wanted us to remain strangers He wouldn't have made it so easy for us to be friends. In fact in my opinion what's happening is crystal clear: He's redeemed my past by showing that something good came out of all that tragedy and failure, and He's giving you—for reasons we don't yet know—someone else in your life whom you can trust to be loyal to you no matter what the circumstances.¹⁸⁴

Thus Charles comes to know, understand, and even forgive his biological father, but Darrow is keen to help him realize that this acquaintance presents a threat to the parents who have raised him, especially to his father. He defines the elder Ashworths' true feelings so that Charles will know how to deal with both his father and his mother when he returns home. His advice to Charles includes the following:

Here you have two people with an identical need: reassurance. You've got to let them know that you do love them, but on the other hand you mustn't pamper them, Charles. You must be yourself, not the ideal son spawned by your glittering image. Be genuine, be loving and be truthful—and then you'll be a far better son than any glittering image could be.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Ibid, 333.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 364.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. 344.

When Charles confronts his parents for the second time, he remembers Darrow's words and presents the truth to them by "exploding" certain myths. First, he tells his mother that the last thing Alan Romaine wants to do is to see them again. Secondly, he denies that he is a carbon-copy of Romaine as his father has always assumed. And thirdly, he professes his love and devotion to his parents despite the fact that his biological father is now present in his life.¹⁸⁶ With the truth so blatantly stated, the elder Ashworth then proposes the next course of action. He tells Charles:

Now this is what your mother and I have decided: we'll all go on exactly as before. We won't talk about it, of course—but that'll be because there won't be any need to talk about it—everything's been said. So although we'll go on as before, everything will be different.¹⁸⁷

This exchange with his parents represents a tremendous stride forward in Charles's intellectual conversion. By accepting and articulating the truth about his biological father with his parents, he can begin to apprehend the truth about the other relationships in his life. Furthermore, after meeting with Darrow, the elder Ashworth can honestly say to Charles: "After all, despite everything you've managed to turn into a mature sensible sort of fellow..."¹⁸⁸ With these words uttered, the glittering image that has plagued Charles for his entire life begins to die and his true self is free to emerge.

Charles must also discover the truth about his relationship with Bishop Jardine. It is complicated by the fact that both men possess a "glittering image" that shrouds their true selves. When urged by Darrow, Charles enumerates other resemblances between Jardine and himself. First, both of their wives became very depressed—Carrie Jardine actually went back to her parents while Jane Ashworth threatened to do so. Both wives

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 348-350.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. 351.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. 355.

were dutiful about sex. Both couples had a period of childlessness followed by the death or loss of a child. Both men had an aversion to celibacy. Both men, too, had problems with their fathers; they both felt rejected by them.¹⁸⁹ Finally, both men were chasing father-son relationships; Jardine neurotically sought a son while Charles needed a father.¹⁹⁰ In the end both Jardine and Charles mutually identify with each other. This causes Jardine to allow Charles to remain at the palace, although he knows he is Archbishop Lang's spy.¹⁹¹ It also moves Charles ultimately to commit fornication with Loretta Staviski, an American professor from Jardine's past, because he thinks he must in some way mimic Jardine's actions.¹⁹² In the end, however, Charles's analysis of his relationship with Bishop Jardine elucidates further the dark corners of his troubled psyche. Darrow articulates the truth to Charles about his problems in these terms:

And of course you can now understand how that nightmare burgeoned in your mind until it reached intolerable proportions. It began not merely because your father had convinced you that you were unfit and unworthy, a man who was only acting the part of a clergyman, but because you felt your father's skepticism was to a frightening degree becoming justified. You *were* worried about your increasing need for alcohol, and you *were* finding yourself in increasing difficulties with women—but why was this happening? Not, contrary to what your father might think, because of some genetic curse. It was happening because you were under increasing psychological strain. The glittering image was becoming more and more of a burden—no wonder you wanted to drink to escape him!—and you had this crucial problem, which you couldn't master, about your inability to face remarriage. The tension caused by this problem remorselessly drove you into errors—errors which only made you feel more unfit, more unworthy—and the inevitable result was that you became imprisoned in a downward spiral of despair.¹⁹³

With this truthful clarification of his problems foremost in his mind, Ashworth can work

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. 270-271.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 372.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. 271.

¹⁹² Ibid. 272.

¹⁹³ Ibid. 273.

toward a resolution of them.

Charles also has to acknowledge the truth about his relationship with Jane, his first wife. Here, too, the glittering image of their marriage made everyone think that they were “the ideal couple.”¹⁹⁴ However, problems existed in the bedroom and in the boardroom. Jane wanted a child while Charles did not;¹⁹⁵ Jane thought that Charles was happy in his position as headmaster of St. Aidan’s, but he was actually very bored and miserable.¹⁹⁶ The climax of their relationship occurs when Jane tells him that she is pregnant, and Charles’s true self admits to her: “My God, that’s the last thing I need to hear after another bloody awful day at this bloody awful school.”¹⁹⁷ This precipitates Jane’s leaving and eventually dying in a horrible auto accident, for which Charles, of course, blames himself. He also wonders if her death were a suicide or not. Darrow compels Charles to see the truth in this tragedy when he says:

The only fact which is beyond dispute here is that your wife is dead. God saw fit, for reasons which are hidden from us, to claim her after only a short life in the world, and you must accept this. Your guilt is making you say that this shouldn’t have happened, that God made a mistake, but this is arrogance. Say to yourself instead: ‘Jane is now beyond all pain and this is God’s will. I did make errors during my marriage but the best thing I can do now is not to wallow in guilt but to find out why I made these errors so that I can ensure they never happen again.’ Then Jane’s death will have meaning.¹⁹⁸

Most of all, by explicating Charles’s relationship with Jane in these terms, Darrow enables the troubled clergyman to recognize the actions of his glittering image which have stifled his true self for so long. As his spiritual director, Darrow urges Charles to show sympathy for his true self with these words:

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. 232.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. 232.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. 231.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. 233.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. 234.

If you regard him [your true self] with sympathy instead of horror then a different image will begin to appear in the mirror. Love and compassion breed understanding and forgiveness, and once a man's understood himself sufficiently to forgive himself for his mistakes, the unfitness is made whole, isn't it, Charles? We want to restore your belief in your own worth so that you can find the courage to set aside the glittering image and triumph over this tyrant who's tormented you for so long.¹⁹⁹

Striving to understand the truth about himself that is behind his glittering image is the substance of Charles Ashworth's intellectual conversion.

The relationship between Charles Ashworth and Lyle Christie is also influenced by the glittering image of the clergyman. Upon making her acquaintance, Ashworth is immediately stricken as is indicated by this description of her:

Miss Christie was small, no more than five foot two, with slender ankles, a slim waist, reddish hair and black-lashed dark eyes. She also possessed high cheekbones, a delicately moulded but very firm chin, and a subtle mouth which somehow reinforced this hint of a determined character while conveying an impression of sensuality. Her make-up was discreet; her grey skirt and white blouse were restrained in taste, as befitted a lady's companion in a clerical household. I thought her alluring beyond description.²⁰⁰

Both this inherent attraction to her and his mission as a spy prompt Ashworth to ask Lyle to go for a drive with him. However, as he is dressing for the occasion, Charles glances in the mirror and is shocked to see "the spy beyond the clergyman, the image beyond the image, and beyond the spy was yet another man, the image beyond the image beyond the image."²⁰¹ This sense of possessing a divided personality frightens Ashworth, and he later thinks that "if Miss Christie could cope with every conceivable crisis in an episcopal household, she could cope with a doctor of divinity who was mad enough to be afraid of his own reflection."²⁰² At first, Lyle appears to Charles to be a possible savior and

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. 235.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. 23.

²⁰¹ Ibid. 70.

²⁰² Ibid. 71.

support for him in his troubles. However, much later when Charles surmises the truth of her situation with Bishop Jardine, he regards her as a “damsel in distress.”²⁰³ Still later after Charles regains his spiritual and psychological equilibrium, when Lyle, pregnant by Jardine, telephones Charles, he becomes her savior by choosing to marry her and subsequently by shielding her from any further contact with Jardine.

The last novel of the Starbridge series, Absolute Truths, is also told from the point of view of Charles Ashworth. In this novel he must face the difficult truth of several situations. For instance, when Ashworth’s elder son Charley turns eighteen, he receives a letter from his biological father, Alex Jardine. Ashworth becomes tormented over the necessity to tell the son he has raised the truth about his real father. Afterward, he ponders how this scene between them actually played out:

Of course, I forgot every word of my set speech. I discovered that my most important need was to keep talking—to impart the same information in a variety of different ways so that the sheer brutality of the truth was cocooned and smothered in excess verbiage.²⁰⁴

During the course of their conversation, Ashworth even admits to himself—“I heard the lie coming but found myself powerless to stop it—‘I’m glad he’s written you this letter,’” he says to Charley, as he hides his true feelings from him. Nevertheless, after eighteen years of deceiving Charley about his biological father, Ashworth finally divulges the truth that he finds so painful to admit to his son. This represents another stride forward in his intellectual conversion.

Still another time when Ashworth is forced to face the truth occurs after Lyle’s death when he is reading her journal. For the first time he realizes that she felt that he

²⁰³ Ibid. 368.

²⁰⁴ Susan Howatch, Absolute Truths 20.

had taken her for granted. He confronts the fact that he had neglected her and especially her recent leadership of and involvement in a women's prayer group. He discovers how much she sacrificed herself for him, how much she was concerned for him, and how much she prayed for him, and his guilt in Lyle's regard intensifies his pain, his suffering, and his bereavement.²⁰⁵

The entries in Lyle's journal also force Ashworth to acknowledge the truth about his relationships with his sons.²⁰⁶ Toward the end of Absolute Truths, he openly admits to each of his sons what has hindered their encounters in the past. Just as Lyle advocated, Charles finally confesses the truth of his feelings toward his son Michael. Recalling Michael's involvement with Dinkie, his American girlfriend, Charles says:

I'd have liked to live with a girl like that when I was your age. But I never got the chance...Of course I could never admit that to myself...It wasn't a truth I was willing to face but your mother quite understood how jealous I was.²⁰⁷

After openly admitting this to Michael, Ashworth's relationship with him becomes more intimate. It even prompts Michael to be honest with his father and to tell him about his current girlfriend Marina, when he says:

And the moment I recognized her [Marina's] strength, I realized what a farce all my relationships with girls had been because of course *I* was the damaged one who needed curing, *I* was the one who couldn't get my act together, and what I really needed wasn't a weak woman but a strong one.²⁰⁸

Charles's and Michael's ability to be frank with one another is seen in these truthful exchanges that are prompted by what Lyle wrote in her journal.

A further indication of Charles's intellectual conversion in terms of apprehending

²⁰⁵ Susan Howatch, Absolute Truths 172-200.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. 191-192.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. 484.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. 490.

the truth occurs when his sons and he are discussing the circumstances surrounding the death of Holly, another girlfriend of Michael. Charles is brutally honest with his sons when he says:

Since you're both being so refreshingly honest...I hardly think I can do less than acknowledge my own part in this disaster. I was responsible for your upbringing. If I'd brought you up a little better no doubt we wouldn't now be sitting around this table and putting one another through hell.²⁰⁹

That this honest admission leaves his sons "dumbfounded" is an indication of the change that has occurred in Charles's way of relating to his sons and his desire to articulate the truth.²¹⁰

Not only with Michael, but also with Charley does Ashworth decide to confess the truth because of what he has read in Lyle's journal. Although he had told Charley about his biological father on his eighteenth birthday, he neglected to paint a truthful portrait of him. Much later, Ashworth finally acknowledges his dishonesty when he says to Charley:

When I told you Samson [Ashworth's code name for Alex Jardine] was a weak man doomed to make a mess of his life, a moral failure and a blighted individual, I spoke out of hatred, jealousy and self-centredness. How I slandered him! But I'll lie about him no more. I'm going to tell you the truth, the whole truth, the ABSOLUTE TRUTH about this man I've wronged for so long.²¹¹

Not only does what Ashworth say here put his relationship with his son Charley on a more genuine level, it also allows him later to acknowledge his guilt in regard to "Samson" and forgive himself for what he has done.²¹²

²⁰⁹ Ibid. 500.

²¹⁰ Elaine Lux, "The Expanding 'I' in Absolute Truths," Bruce Johnson and Charles A. Huttar, ed. Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch 87-88. Lux points out that Ashworth's inclusion of Lyle's perspective through her journal in his own narrative helps to make him more empathic toward and present for his sons.

²¹¹ Ibid. 527.

²¹² Ibid. 562. In this instance it is Lewis Hall, a perceptive priest in whom Charles confides, who points out to Charles his need to forgive himself.

Intertwined with his apprehension of the truth is Ashworth's tendency to resurrect his glittering image in order to deal with certain unpalatable or painful events in his life. For example, when he is forced to conceal the fact that he most likely will dismiss the wayward priest Desmond from his duties, Charles hides behind his glittering image once again.²¹³ After Lyle's death, until the funeral is over, Charles admits to himself that "the glittering image had been giving everyone the impression that the Bishop was more than capable of dealing with humdrum chores."²¹⁴ Only Jon Darrow perceives the return of the glittering image, and he challenges Charles to admit that this image has been resurrected when he summons him to his cottage and greets him with these words:

I trust you left your alter ego behind...Forgive me for ordering you over here...but I could no longer bear the thought of that glittering image ruling the roost at the South Canonry.²¹⁵

It is Charles's glittering image that repeatedly refuses to face the truth and it is this persona that most impedes the progress of his intellectual conversion, his apprehension of the truth about himself and his relationships with other people.

The most important relationship that must be remade in truth is that between Ashworth and Aysgarth. Not until after Charles listens to Aysgarth's confession of the truth about himself and his creative financing does he pray "for the courage to speak nothing but the truth"²¹⁶ about himself. In Darrow's and Aysgarth's presence, Ashworth finally concedes:

I'm sure I was given this rich, powerful bishopric so that I could stand up for conservative values with the maximum effect...but what's happened here in Starbridge? I've been debilitated by unresolved conflicts with the result that I've lost my way. I've become not a conservative bishop, concerned with truth and

²¹³ Ibid. 101.

²¹⁴ Ibid. 157.

²¹⁵ Ibid. 160-161.

²¹⁶ Ibid. 588.

tradition, but a parody of a conservative bishop, concerned with making an idol of the past and tailoring the truth to fit it.

I knew from the beginning that something was wrong...but I blamed the job and not the unresolved conflicts that were sapping my spiritual energy.

Lyle was very concerned. I suppose that was when she made her heroic decision to sacrifice her own welfare to the task of keeping me going. If I hadn't had Lyle, I couldn't have gone on.²¹⁷

Ashworth's honest appraisal of himself even allows Aysgarth to see his future and that of his once enemy Ashworth with clarity; Aysgarth then suggests that both of them are at a crossroads. However, he imagines rightfully that he is being called to resign his position as Dean of Starbridge Cathedral while Charles is to continue as bishop in a "revitalized, resurrected way."²¹⁸

Toward the end of Absolute Truths, Ashworth reflects Bernard Lonergan's definition of intellectual conversion that leads to truth through cognitional self-transcendence. Lonergan perceives conversion as a process that has both forward movement and occasional breakdowns. Such is the truth with which Ashworth has been concerned in his memoir, that is, the entire novel. Pursuing the truth to the "final line" as he says, makes him define reality in these terms:

Life is open-ended. Human beings are fallible. They crawl forward, then slip back before crawling again. Catastrophes lurk to ambush them. Tragedies erupt unexpectedly. "The whole creation" as St. Paul wrote, "groaneth and travaileth in pain," but nothing worthwhile can be created without blood, sweat and tears, and at least we know that our Creator is alongside, sharing our suffering and never abandoning that enormous struggle to "make everything come right."²¹⁹

This is the truth that Charles Ashworth comes to embrace about himself and about the characters with whom he interacts in the novels and it coincides with Lonergan's definition of intellectual conversion.

²¹⁷ Ibid. 588-589.

²¹⁸ Ibid. 593.

²¹⁹ Ibid. 599.

The moral conversion of Charles Ashworth, or in Lonergan's terms, the "apprehension of values that are affirmed and realized through self-transcendence,"²²⁰ can be discussed in relation to the strict standards regarding sexuality, drinking, and smoking that he upholds and his failure or breakdown in maintaining these traditional conventions, especially when faced with a crisis. The first crisis presented to Ashworth occurs as a result of the death of his wife Jane and the situation he is called to investigate involving the Jardines and Lyle Christie. As an unmarried priest, Ashworth realizes that he is called to celibacy at this time in his life; however, his weakness with regard to his sexual energy causes him not only to make undesired advances toward Lyle, but also to engage in an illicit liaison with Loretta Staviski.²²¹ During the latter, Charles realizes that he is at the point of "disintegration" which he tries to abate by smoking a cigarette²²² and then later by drinking.²²³ However, he is unaware of the depth and breadth of his distress until, at his request, Loretta takes him to the Fordite monastery at Grantchester where he encounters Jon Darrow who helps him to sort out the mysteries of his personality and his past. Eventually fortified physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and under the guidance of Darrow, Ashworth can make the moral decision to help the pregnant and unwed Lyle in a way similar to that in which his father had rescued his mother. He ponders the intricacies of his decision in these words:

In three seconds I saw it all, the inscrutability of God, the redemption of past tragedy, the backbreaking road into a barely conceivable future. Time completed some eerie circle; I was my father, Lyle was my mother and the embryo was me, waiting for the one man who had the will to give it the future God required. Yet all was subtly changed; I was not my father, Lyle was not my mother and the embryo was not and could never be me. The game was the same but the cards

²²⁰ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 240-241.

²²¹ Susan Howatch, *Glittering Images* 150-164.

²²² Ibid. 161

²²³ Ibid. 165.

had been reshuffled and it was hard to perceive the dimensions of the hand I had been dealt. All I knew was that I was being called to play that hand. Of that I had no doubt whatsoever.²²⁴

Because of his love for Lyle and for her welfare and that of the child she is carrying, Charles can transcend his own feelings at this point and make the decision to marry her. This is a giant step forward in his moral conversion, according to Bernard Lonergan's definition of it.

The second crisis that impinges on Charles Ashworth's moral conversion is his experience of being a prisoner of war in a German camp. Although the reader only encounters Ashworth after he returns home, there are indications of what this harrowing experience has done to the sedate Cambridge don. Neville Aysgarth observes Charles after this ordeal and notes what he sees in these words:

Ashworth leant forward, swiped the port decanter and refilled his own glass with an unsteady hand. That was the moment when I realized that contrary to my expectations he too was standing in the wasteland, a very different wasteland from mine but one which still required Darrow's presence at the foot of the cross.²²⁵

As witnesses to the distress that he has suffered, the following uncharacteristic actions of Ashworth himself reinforce Aysgarth's observations:

"Oh my God!" shouted Ashworth, suddenly slamming his fist on the table and leaping to his feet. "How can you be so blind! Can't you see? *We must face the evil in order to be redeemed!* We don't need a theology of the Incarnation, not now, not in 1946, not after all those years of global hell! We need a theology of redemption! We've got to repent in shame and live, not fester in guiltless optimism and die!" And seizing his empty glass, he smashed it in the fireplace before blundering blindly from the room.²²⁶

In theological terms, this outburst merely underscores Ashworth's frustration on the

²²⁴ Ibid. 402.

²²⁵ Susan Howatch, Ultimate Prizes 361.

²²⁶ Ibid. 362.

home front after he returns from the war. At the beginning of Absolute Truths, he tells about his “damaged health” after the war and how it has inhibited any attempt to conceive a third child. Lyle endures this disappointment, but he himself says he “languished, suffering a reaction from my long ordeal and reduced to apathy by the well-known syndrome of survivors’ guilt.”²²⁷ While a strict regime of diet and exercise, together with the support of his biological father, Alan Romaine, helps to nurse Charles back to health, still, as he recounts honestly, “the marriage limped on.”²²⁸ Although his relationship with Lyle is besieged on so many fronts, yet he remains committed to her, to the child that is not his own—Charley--and to his biological son Michael. Certainly Ashworth’s faithfulness in this regard can be attributed to the depth of his moral conversion.

The third crisis that influences Ashworth’s moral conversion is the tragic and unexpected death of Lyle herself²²⁹ together with the revelations imparted to him when he reads her journal.²³⁰ Catapulted into an abyss of grief, Charles struggles to maintain some sort of normalcy in his life, but his bereavement is too intense. Longing for Lyle, he experiences a breakdown in his moral conversion when he turns to alcohol and ponders his plight in these words:

Round and round my thoughts went in an increasingly confused pattern of circles, and more and more claret disappeared from the bottle I had opened the previous evening, but instead of calming me down the alcohol this time seemed to stir me up so that I found myself moving beyond inertia into a thickening fog of grief.

I said to myself: “This is a phase of bereavement. It’s all perfectly normal. It’ll pass.” But I felt more distracted than ever, and in panic I returned to Lyle’s sitting-room to escape into that imaginary future which seemed so natural, so

²²⁷ Susan Howatch, Absolute Truths 14.

²²⁸ Ibid 14.

²²⁹ Ibid. 145.

²³⁰ Ibid. 172-197.

credible, so absolutely waiting to happen in a parallel world where blood clots [the cause of Lyle's death] never formed.²³¹

Just as Charles attempts to quell the torrent of his grief with alcohol, he uses what he calls “a very typical episode of casual sex” to anaesthetize himself in his pain.²³² This represents another moral breakdown. Only after the fact does Charles consider what he has done in these words:

I had stopped thinking about fornication the moment I had entered Sheila's flat. It had never occurred to me that fornication would be possible with a bishop's widow who was the soul of propriety, and when the opportunity to err presented itself with such peculiar suddenness, I certainly did not observe to myself: I am about to commit fornication. This is a sin. I must desist at once. Indeed I cannot remember conducting any interior dialogue with myself at all. The sexual drive, which I had been suppressing so hard, merely rose to the surface of my mind and wiped out all the thoughts I should have had—the rational thoughts, the mortal thoughts, the thoughts of a bishop, a theologian and a man not inexperienced in the ways of the world. In the resulting amnesia I only knew that my battered self, tormented beyond endurance, had at last been reprieved from pain.²³³

In Lonergan's terms, this “casual sex” with Sheila represents another breakdown in Ashworth's moral conversion. However, because he has suffered a lapse in adhering to his own moral ideals, he becomes less judgmental of others as he begins to experience and value compassionate understanding.

Three incidents in particular witness to this advance in Ashworth's moral conversion, that is, a move from his stringent judgmental self to being someone who is compassionate, forgiving, and understanding.²³⁴ The first occurs when he encounters Martin Darrow. When the young man confesses to having suffered from a “sexual

²³¹ Ibid. 219.

²³² Ibid. 324.

²³³ Ibid. 323-324.

²³⁴ Elaine Lux, “The Expanding ‘I’ in *Absolute Truths*” 72 states: “Implicit in both the story and the way Ashworth chooses to tell it is the expansion of his character from self-centeredness to a capacity for empathy.”

disaster” followed by a lapse into alcoholism, Charles himself notes that he reacts uncharacteristically:

“Anyone can suffer a sex-disaster.” I paused. I think I was waiting for Bishop Ashworth, that moral paragon, to take control of the scene with a suitably smooth-tongued pastoral performance...but nothing happened. It seemed the Bishop had gone away. Instead someone else—the “I” who was quite other than this glittering image—said: “Anyone can repent too, and be forgiven.”²³⁵

Because he is aware of his own sinful actions and his need to repent of them, Ashworth adopts a kinder, gentler, more merciful pose toward Martin.

A second instance when Ashworth exhibits the value of compassion occurs when he encounters Desmond after Lewis Hall, another clergyman, has befriended him. Despite the remaking of his image into someone who is more wholesome, even smart, Desmond “wilts” before his bishop who knows his deepest sins. Ashworth, on the other hand, has experienced moral conversion, and he notes this himself:

But I found I was unable to play the black-capped judge. Indeed I found I was unable to play a judge of any kind because I was remembering my own excursion through the darker streets of London. I saw myself as no better than Desmond, and I found I had nothing to say.

In the face of such appalling self-knowledge, stripped of all illusions, one can only repent, and in the face of such repentance one can only be forgiven, and in the face of such forgiveness one can only receive healing and bestow it.²³⁶

Because of his own failure with regard to sexual morality, Ashworth becomes the perfect example of the compassionate, forgiving wounded healer.²³⁷

Yet a third time does Ashworth demonstrate the change wrought in him because of his moral conversion, and it happens after he has listened to his enemy Aysgarth

²³⁵ Susan Howatch, *Absolute Truths* 334-335.

²³⁶ Ibid. 346. Chapter One, page 46 also refers to Ashworth’s empathetic thoughts toward Desmond.

²³⁷ Elaine Lux, “The Expanding ‘I’ in *Absolute Truths*” 90. Lux maintains that “the motif of the wounded healer...is Howatch’s prevailing archetypal viewpoint for the Christian pilgrimage.”

describe his elaborate financial scheme. As noted before, even Aysgarth himself admits that his machinations were “shady,” and that he is “unfit to be a clergyman.”²³⁸ To his surprise, Aysgarth only hears words from Ashworth that serve to dissolve any hostility that may have existed between them. He utters the biblical injunction: “Judge not that ye be not judged,”²³⁹ and this quotation reveals the depth of Ashworth’s moral conversion.

Charles Ashworth’s religious conversion embodies Lonergan’s definition of it as a “total self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservation . . . not as an act, but as a dynamic state that is prior to and principle of subsequent acts.”²⁴⁰ At the end of Glittering Images when he goes to encounter Bishop Jardine after he has made the decision to marry Lyle, for instance, Charles recognizes both his total dependence on God for strength and the necessity for him to do God’s will. As he waits for Jardine to assimilate the reality of the situation he has portrayed, Charles humbly describes his own spiritual and emotional state in these terms:

I withdrew to the hall. I was still channeling my concentration into keeping the blackboard of my mind clear, but although I continued to pray for enlightenment, I remained confused. As Darrow had so truthfully pointed out, I was in many ways a very ordinary clergyman and I now felt quite out of my spiritual depth. Again I prayed for the grace of God which would transform my weakness into strength, and again the familiar prayer of Christ echoed in my mind: let thy will, not mine, be done.²⁴¹

The recognition of his own weakness before God on whom he is totally dependent and his strong desire to align his will with that of the Almighty constitute the main elements that attest to Ashworth’s religious conversion in Lonergan’s terms. So convinced is he of his call to marry Lyle and thus to extricate her from a disastrous predicament that he

²³⁸ Susan Howatch, Absolute Truths 586. Also see page 199 of this chapter for the entire quotation.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 241.

²⁴¹ Susan Howatch, Glittering Images 427.

remains adamant about secluding her and the child she is bearing from Jardine.

Spiritually strengthened by the guidance he's received from Jon Darrow, Ashworth remains firm in his resolve to answer his call, in other words, to do God's will as he perceives it.

Another indication of Ashworth's religious conversion occurs at the moment when he decides to forgive the wayward priest Desmond. Encompassed by the light of self-knowledge, he is moved by compassion to surrendering to God's will once again. He describes this process in these words:

Then suddenly that black moment of self-knowledge was infused with light. I felt as if someone had walked through the nearest door and switched on a mighty torch which destroyed every shadow in the hall. I could not see this great surge of light, but as it streamed into the deepest reaches of my mind I realized what was happening...I was witnessing the process of salvation. I was witnessing redemption. I was witnessing an absolute truth which in my past rush to pass judgement I had been so willing to overlook for so long.

For one timeless moment all self-centred preoccupation with my own suffering was eclipsed. The darkness had disappeared, and by the brilliant light which remained I saw clearly—so clearly that I was almost blinded—what I was now being called to do.²⁴²

For one brief moment the light of God's grace illumines not only the state of Ashworth's soul but also the process through which redemption and salvation come both to Desmond and himself. Ashworth must align himself once again with God's will, and this means that he must forgive Desmond. He indicates that he is willing to do this by extending his hand toward the repentant priest. Thus his will is aligned with that of God.²⁴³

Another moment when Ashworth's religious conversion is evident occurs during the funeral of Neville Aysgarth. For a brief time, he glimpses the unity of creation with its creator and his place within the entire scheme. He thus surrenders himself to the

²⁴² Susan Howatch, Absolute Truths 346.

²⁴³ Ibid. 347.

process of creation and to the will of God for him. He contemplates these absolute truths as the organist plays the lengthy introduction to the service's anthem in Starbridge

Cathedral:

At that moment I knew our Creator had touched not only me but all of us, just as Harriet had touched that sculpture with a loving hand long ago, and in that touch I sensed the indestructible fidelity, the indestructible devotion and the inexhaustible energy of the Creator as he shaped his creation, bringing life out of dead matter, wresting form continually from chaos. Nothing was ever lost, Harriet had said, and nothing was ever wasted because always, when the work was finally completed, every particle of the created process, seen or unseen, kept or discarded, broken or mended—*everything* was justified, glorified and redeemed. Then I thought...of the pattern our Creator had made of us as he toiled to shape the dark with the light in such a way that our suffering was given meaning, the meaning which gave value to our lives.²⁴⁴

Articulating his theology of creation in this way, Ashworth comprehends his role and the role of all created beings in the grand plan of the Divine. Subsequently he recalls the events of his past, and he realizes that his life reflects the Divine plan for creation in which “all things intermingle for good.” As he then listens to his son Charley preach the funeral sermon, he contemplates all of this and envisions the spiritual reality that forms the core of his beliefs and of his life. He meditates on all of this in these words:

Indeed in the end there are no words, only Christ on the cross symbolizing God's agonizing involvement with his creation, Christ rising from the dead symbolizing God's creative promise to redeem and renew, Christ enacting in flesh and blood the absolute truths for all mankind to see.²⁴⁵

Ashworth's religious conversion transcends time and space at the end of the last novel of

²⁴⁴ Ibid. 617. Ashworth recalls the sculptor Harriet March, her sculpture of Aysgarth's hands, and her words about the artist's creative process. The creative process and its relation to conversion will be discussed more fully in Chapter Five.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. 621.

the Starbridge series as he feels he is clasping hands again with both Neville Aysgarth and Jon Darrow on the spiritual journey that has both united them and transformed them.²⁴⁶

4.5. A Few Similarities Among the Three Characters' Conversion Experiences

In speaking of the similarities among the conversion experiences of Jon Darrow, Neville Aysgarth, and Charles Ashworth, one must recall Bernard Lonergan's definition of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. As has already been stated, "intellectual conversion is to truth attained by cognitional self-transcendence; moral conversion is to values that are apprehended, affirmed, and realized by a real self-transcendence; religious conversion is to a total being-in-love as the efficacious ground of all self-transcendence, whether in the pursuit of truth, or in the realization of human values, or in the orientation adopted to the universe, its ground and its goal."²⁴⁷ This being said, the intellectual conversion of each of these characters leads to their discovery of the truth about their past and about the relationships they have or have had with significant people in their lives. Specifically, each character has to apprehend the truth about his father and the respective relationships that developed with them.

Jon Darrow, for instance, must admit to the anger he harbors toward his father for not summoning him at the moment of his mother's death and for expecting his son to become a replica of himself. Neville Aysgarth must discover the truth about his father's

²⁴⁶ Ibid. 621.

²⁴⁷ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 241.

death and also revisit, learn the truth about, and redeem his relationship with his Uncle Willoughby who became his surrogate father. Charles Ashworth must confront the man who raised him to find out the truth about his biological father, and then meet the latter, forgive him, and develop a working rapport with him. Not until each of these characters searches for and understands the truth about these people and the relationships they had or have with them can they progress in their overall conversion and begin to tackle the present crises in which they find themselves. In other words, they must look to the past to help them find answers for the present and the future. This is the salient similarity among the three characters' intellectual conversion experiences.

With regard to the moral conversion of Darrow, Aysgarth, and Ashworth, a similarity can be seen in the care and concern for other people that such a conversion nurtures in them. Because of his background, his calling as a Fordite monk and also because of his keen gift of discernment, Darrow is placed in the position of helping disturbed clergymen. In this capacity he comes to aid both Ashworth and Aysgarth separately when each is in crisis, and, toward the end of the series, he wisely brings these two characters together so that they may be reconciled to each other. Darrow is successful in his interventions in these two clergymen's lives because he himself understands firsthand the foibles of troubled clergymen and thus he can approach them with compassion. Aysgarth, too, exhibits this same kind of compassion when he is dealing with the German prisoners of war on Starbury Plain. At first he is preoccupied with his inadequacies as a pastor, but once he forgets himself, he uses his gifts to help and heal those in his care. As a result of his own moral indiscretions, Ashworth also becomes compassionate toward Martin, Desmond, and even Aysgarth when he is called

to choose between offering each of them judgment or mercy. The moral conversion of each character calls for them to model Christian charity and understanding toward those with whom they interact.

The religious conversion of Darrow, Aysgarth, and Ashworth involves the fundamental surrender of each man to the will of God. Not only have all three of them surrendered themselves by becoming priests in the Anglican Church, they also are presented with more poignant situations in their lives when surrendering to others signifies their surrender to the Almighty. For instance, after the healing service that goes horribly out of control, Darrow is at his weakest and must bow to the will of Francis Ingram. At this moment he senses the real presence of God strengthening him and healing him. Aysgarth feels God's presence, too, when he is at his weakest and has surrendered himself to Darrow's will for him to see and hold his deceased son. Ashworth also has similar feelings of God's presence when he is seated in Starbridge Cathedral surrendered to the power of God manifested in Aysgarth's funeral service. There he envisions himself as an important though minuscule part of the entire process of God's creation. Thus when each man is humbled before God, his religious conversion becomes most apparent.

4.6. A Few Differences Among the Three Characters' Conversion Experiences

The differences in the intellectual, moral, and religious conversion experiences of Jon Darrow, Neville Aysgarth, and Charles Ashworth arise because of their individual personalities and their varied life situations. Darrow's intellectual conversion centers

around his use of his “glamorous powers” in everything from assessing the truthfulness of his initial vision to his healing of others. When he misunderstands his “glamorous powers” or uses them dishonestly for self-aggrandizement, he falters in his process of intellectual conversion. The intellectual conversion of Neville Aysgarth, on the other hand, involves his pursuit of the “ultimate prizes” that will satisfy one of the three Nevilles of his divided personality. Honestly recognizing the roots of his divided self and unifying them toward one purpose comprise the goal of Aysgarth’s intellectual conversion. For Charles Ashworth, it is his “glittering image” that impedes his process of intellectual conversion. Until he discovers why he dons this false mask and who he truly is beneath it, his intellectual conversion remains hampered.

Differences among the three characters’ moral conversion occur especially in the type of breakdowns from which each suffers. Darrow’s breakdown encompasses his use of his glamorous powers to heal Anne when they are on their honeymoon. Although her being healed does lead to his sexual satisfaction, the primary emphasis in this breakdown is the misuse of a hypnotic technique in order to gain power over Anne’s emotions. Aysgarth’s breakdown, on the other hand, is more overtly connected to his sexual drive. His emotional *liaison* with Dido while Grace is still alive, his sexual encounter with Lyle after Jardine’s funeral, and his affair with Venetia Flaxton are the direct results of his abandoning his own expressed moral code which opposes fornication and adultery. The breakdowns that arise in Ashworth’s moral conversion are similar to those of Aysgarth since they involve illicit sexual encounters. However, both his sexual encounter with Loretta and again with Sheila occur while he is grieving, the former, because he is grieving for Jane, and the latter, because he is grieving for Lyle. This does not excuse

Ashworth's actions in either case; however, it does make these breakdowns more understandable.

Perhaps it is in their religious conversion that the greatest difference can be noted among these three characters. Darrow expresses his religious conversion in mystical terms. He speaks of God's love, for instance, in words that recall the writings of Julian of Norwich.²⁴⁸ Standing in the position of a Liberal Protestant Modernist, Aysgarth expresses his religious conversion in terms of the compassionate Christ who shares and stands with humankind in their sufferings. As the conservative Anglican, Ashworth couches his religious conversion in the language of creation as he locates himself and every creature within the Almighty's plan. These are a few of the differences that can be discerned in the intellectual, moral, and religious conversion experiences of Jon Darrow, Neville Aysgarth, and Charles Ashworth.

Having analyzed the conversion experiences of the three main characters in the Starbridge series in accord with Lonergan's theory, we now turn in Chapter Five to a few ancillary topics related to this specific subject.

²⁴⁸ Susan Howatch, Glamorous Powers 382. Darrow speaks of being "overwhelmed by the boundless and indescribable nature of divine love that recalls passages in the writings of Julian of Norwich such as the following: "I had three kinds of understandings on this light of love: the first is love uncreated; the second is love created; the third is love given. Love uncreated is God; love created is our soul in God; love given is virtue"...The Complete Julian of Norwich, trans. Fr. John Julian, OJN (Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2009) 369.

Chapter 5

Critique of Howatch in Light of Bernard Lonergan

5.1. Introduction

This chapter will proceed first by revisiting William Herbert Vanstone's theology which lies at the heart of the last novel of the series, Absolute Truths, and also forms the basis of Susan Howatch's thinking on the creative process in general. The relation of Vanstone's theology to Bernard Lonergan's theory of conversion will also be demonstrated. Then the effect of the different theological perspectives of the three main characters in the Starbridge series on Lonergan's conversion process itself will be discussed. Since "breakdowns," in Lonergan's terms, or "sin" play such an integral role within the conversion process, the effect of sin on conversion will then be examined. Because the conversion of the three main characters studied in this dissertation takes place in a specific context, the Church of England then will be assessed as an appropriate venue where conversion according to Lonergan's theory may occur. Lastly, the implications of this entire study for modern Christians will be evaluated.

5.2. Howatch's Illustration of William Herbert Vanstone's Theology in Light of Bernard Lonergan's Theory of Conversion

The theology of W. H. Vanstone, especially his phenomenology of love, has already been presented in this dissertation.¹ However, it is helpful to recall here that Vanstone's discussion of the phenomenology of love proceeds by his presenting definitions of inauthentic and authentic love. In relating Vanstone's theology to Bernard Lonergan's theory of conversion, authentic love, that is, the love of God for his creation or for an individual, is very relevant. It will be remembered that, according to Vanstone, the love of God for creation, or authentic love, is characterized by limitlessness, precariousness, and vulnerability. In the life-long process of conversion envisioned by Lonergan, it is the limitless love of God, or grace, which first moves an individual to embark on this journey toward self-transcendence. God's love in this endeavor called conversion is also precarious because the beloved creation or individual is given complete freedom that might lead to a tragic situation. This accounts for sin or evil or "breakdowns," as Lonergan calls them, in the process of conversion. Lastly, God's love is vulnerable with respect to creation or the individual because God does not take away the freedom of response that may result in triumph or tragedy for the individual and "hurt" or "disappointment" in God that is beyond God's control.²

¹ See Chapter One, pages 17-22 of this dissertation for a summary of Vanstone's theology extrapolated from W. H. Vanstone, Love's Endeavor, Love's Expense: The Response of Being to the Love of God (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977) .

² See Chapter One, page 20 of this dissertation or W. H. Vanstone Love's Endeavor, Love's Expense: The Response of Being to the Love of God 67.

In the novels of the Starbridge series, Susan Howatch draws an analogy between the creative work of God and the creative process of the artist. This analogy has its basis in the theology of W.H. Vanstone. It also can be extended into the life of her three main characters as they labor in their process of conversion according to Bernard Lonergan's scheme. It is helpful if one thinks of the individual as "creating" or "loving" the new transcendent self he/she will become through the process of conversion. Vanstone speaks of the limitlessness of God's love in terms of kenosis, the "Divine self-emptying,"³ and in the process of conversion, in order to transcend the self, there must also be a type of emptying of self or letting go of what one has hitherto maintained. Thus in intellectual conversion one must give up the myth that "knowing is like looking, that objectivity is seeing what is there to be seen and not seeing what is not there;"⁴ in moral conversion, one must abandon mere satisfactions for the self and aspire to values that have consequences which are more far-reaching;⁵ and in religious conversion one must surrender oneself in a "total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations."⁶ The authentic love of God is also precarious, thus accounting for sin and evil in creation; in the process of conversion, the freedom with which the individual is endowed may also lead to "breakdowns" that hinder or temporarily halt his/her progress toward self-transcendence. Yet these "breakdowns" always contain the possibility of redemption. Finally, as God is vulnerable in his creative activity, so, too, is the individual who is involved in intellectual, moral, or religious conversion susceptible to the outcomes of his/her own initiatives and responses.

³ Ibid. 58.

⁴ Lonergan, Method in Theology 238.

⁵ Ibid. 240.

⁶ Ibid. 240.

In the Starbridge series, Howatch expresses Vanstone's theology through the sculptor Harriet March,⁷ and her words can be applied simultaneously to the creative activity of God, to that of the artist, and to the process of conversion in which Howatch's three main characters are involved. Part of Harriet's monologue occurs in Chapter One, but the entire quotation includes the following:

No creator can forget! If the blast-off's successful you're hooked, and once you're hooked you're inside the work as well as outside it, it's part of you, you're welded to it, you're enslaved, and that's why it's such bloody hell when things go adrift. But no matter how much the mess and distortion make you want to despair, you can't abandon the work because you're *chained* to the bloody thing, it's absolutely woven into your soul and you know you can never rest until you've brought truth out of all the distortion and beauty out of all the mess—but it's agony, agony, *agony*—while simultaneously being the most wonderful and rewarding experience in the world—and *that's* the creative process which so few people understand. It involves an indestructible sort of fidelity, an insane sort of hope, and [sic] indescribable sort of...well, it's love, isn't it? There's no other word for it. You love the work and you suffer with it and always—*always*—you're slaving away against all odds to make everything come right.”⁸

Just as the Creator or the artist becomes “hooked” to the work he/she is creating, even more so does the individual become attached to the process of conversion or to God to whom conversion is oriented. This does not mean that “messes” do not occur; they, too, are part of the process, whether it be creating a work of art or creating a self-transcendent individual. Harriet March continues to describe the creative process, and it is as if she is describing the lives of Jon Darrow, Neville Aysgarth, or Charles Ashworth as they wend their way in their own individual processes of conversion: Harriet says:

“Every step I take—every bit of clay I ever touch—they're all there in the final work. If they hadn't happened, then this”—she gestured to the sculpture—

⁷ Susan Howatch, “The Starbridge Novels and Twentieth Century Anglican Theology,” *Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch* 247. Howatch writes: “I'm not saying I'm like Harriet in personality; I'm saying that she, like me, is a creator, and when she describes the creative process to Charles Ashworth and he sees in it a powerful doctrine of redemption, that dialogue constitutes my signature, like the artist's signature on the bottom of a painting.”

⁸ Susan Howatch, *Absolute Truths* 377.

“wouldn’t exist. In fact they *had* to happen for the work to emerge as it is. So in the end every major disaster, every tiny error, every wrong turning, every fragment of discarded clay, all the blood, sweat and tears—*everything* has meaning. I give it meaning. I reuse, reshape, recast all that goes wrong so that in the end nothing is wasted and nothing is without significance and nothing ceases to be precious to me.”⁹

As will be noted in the third section of this chapter, even the “breakdowns” or sins of each of the characters lead to a furthering of their conversion experiences. In Vanstone’s terms, the artist or the creator or the person undergoing conversion gives him/herself to the process in a complete or limitless way. This way is precarious and fraught with “breakdowns” which make the individual vulnerable in the process. However, “every tiny error, every wrong turning...all the blood, sweat, and tears” have meaning in each character’s conversion because they are part of the process, delineated by Howatch herself and discussed in Chapter One, that goes from sin, repentance, and forgiveness to redemption, resurrection, and renewal.

5.3. The Effect of Different Theological Perspectives on Conversion

As has been noted before, the three main characters in the Starbridge series represent three theological perspectives within Anglicanism. At the conclusion of the novel *Absolute Truths*, Susan Howatch reviews these once again: Jon Darrow represents the Anglo-Catholic mystic; Neville Aysgarth, the liberal Protestant Modernist; and Charles Ashworth, the conservative churchman from the Middle Way.¹⁰ In Chapter 4 of this dissertation, the process of each of these characters’ intellectual, moral, and religious conversion as described by Bernard Lonergan was explicated and analyzed. Thus this

⁹ Ibid. 377-378.

¹⁰ Susan Howatch, *Absolute Truths* 595.

theoretical description of conversion was applied to the experiences of these three characters within each of their three theological perspectives. In other words, an Anglo-Catholic mystic, a liberal Protestant Modernist, and a conservative churchman from the Middle Way in the Church of England can experience conversion as it is specified by Bernard Lonergan in his Method in Theology. The question may now be raised regarding the effect that each theological perspective has on conversion.

As a mystic who also values an Anglo-Catholic approach to liturgy, Jon Darrow possesses a propensity for the truth that lies beneath things that are merely observed. Intellectual conversion, therefore, as Lonergan describes it, comes naturally to him, since it is the truth of the world mediated by meaning and not merely by sight.¹¹ Darrow's mystical stance also precipitates his moral conversion since this is geared toward eternal values, not merely satisfactions. Religious conversion, too, is appropriate to the mystic Darrow since it is defined by Lonergan as being grasped by ultimate concern and leading to a total self-surrender or other-worldly falling in love.¹² Yet, although Darrow may be classified as a mystic, his approach to mysticism is decidedly practical and unsentimental.¹³

In his conversations with his granddaughter Janet, for example, Darrow explains both the mystical perspective on reality and just what a mystic is. His cogent statements demonstrate affinities with Lonergan's definition of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. Thus he explains mysticism to Janet:

¹¹ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 238.

¹² Ibid. 240.

¹³ Howatch characterizes Darrow's approach to mysticism in this way, writing that she "appreciated Dean Inge's hard-headed scholarly approach to mysticism" and that she modeled John Darrow after him. See Susan Howatch, "The Starbridge Novels and Twentieth-Century Anglican Theology," Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch 243.

It's hard for people who operate on only five senses to perceive a reality which they can't hear, see, touch, taste or smell. However, there's a vast mass of evidence which suggests that not only does this ultimate reality exist but that it can be perceived by man. For instance, Plato (who was a mystic) said that the fully real is fully knowable.¹⁴

Then, to Janet's query concerning what a mystic is, Darrow replies:

A mystic is someone who can perceive ultimate reality, the ground of our being, known variously as God or the Absolute or the One. Mysticism isn't confined to Christianity; it's the raw material of religion and exists independently of creeds and sects and religion in organised form. But in my opinion a mystic should work within an organised Church because he needs the discipline of a stable framework in order to remain spiritually healthy.¹⁵

Being a mystic aids Darrow on his journey of conversion because he already is inclined to open himself to truth, value, and ultimate reality—the ends of intellectual, moral and religious conversion respectively.

Darrow's propensity for Anglo-Catholic ritual in worship also abets his process of conversion for it embodies eternal truths by employing symbols. When Anne questions Darrow on his preferred liturgical style, he explains:

A rich liturgical tradition can play a vital part in providing symbols for truths which can't easily be expressed. In my opinion ritual can make complex truths more accessible—and particularly to people who lack the education to receive truth in the form of complex word structures. Hence the effectiveness of the Anglo-Catholic slum-priests.¹⁶

Furthermore, Darrow also admits that it is Anglo-Catholicism that gives his own “private

¹⁴ Susan Howatch, *Glamorous Powers* 146.

¹⁵ Ibid. 147.

¹⁶ Ibid. 217. The Anglo-Catholic slum priests gave the slum dwellers and the working class a taste of the beauty and holiness of God's kingdom in the midst of their squalor by bringing them the richness of a liturgical tradition replete with symbols that stood in stark contrast to their impoverished living conditions. “Our Heritage of Witness,” *Society of Catholic Priests*, online, 25 Sept. 2009.

gnosis...a full, meaningful public expression.”¹⁷ He claims his hero is Charles Gore, and this helps demonstrate further his penchant for Anglo-Catholicism. In his praise of Gore, Darrow justifies his own Anglo-Catholic tendencies to Anne:

He was one of the greatest religious leaders of the Church in this century. It was Gore who adapted the Anglo-Catholicism of the Oxford Movement to a more modern era when he enabled it to meet and master biblical criticism, Gore who encouraged young Anglo-Catholic priests to work among the poor, Gore who founded a brotherhood of celibate priests, Gore who seemed, when I was a young man, to have his finger on the pulse of an up-to-date, dynamic version of Christianity, Gore who laid the foundations of the twentieth century Anglo-Catholic tide which is sweeping through the Church of England.¹⁸

This hero-worship of Charles Gore only serves to show that Darrow’s feet are planted firmly in the rich soil of Anglo-Catholicism, and this, together with his mystical bent, help to further his conversion in Lonergan’s terms.

A specific Christology emerges from Darrow’s mystical, Anglo-Catholic stance, and over the course of his life, it embraces the rich symbolism of the cross. Although it appears most evident in a dream that he has while he is in London being questioned by Francis Ingram, the Abbot General, about the validity of his vision, Darrow has thus far found meaning for his life in the “image of Christ crucified, Christ atoning.”¹⁹ It has already been stated that Darrow’s entering the monastery was perceived by him as atonement for his sins toward his first wife Betty and his children. In this dream, moreover, Darrow refers to this as his “symbolic act,” the way he can “live in imitation of Christ.”²⁰ However, in the midst of this dream, the image of the cross changes, just as

¹⁷ Ibid. 218.

¹⁸ Ibid. 218.

¹⁹ Ibid. 99.

²⁰ Ibid. 99.

Darrow, too, is changing from being a monk in a monastery to a priest in the world. This transformation is indicated in the following description of his dream:

I was making a cross in the workshop at Ruydale. I worked and worked at my crucifix, that image of Christ crucified, Christ atoning, until at last Alfred the carpenter who had trained me said: "You can put that aside now, lad. Martin no longer needs it. Just make a cross instead for the chapel in the woods."

So I put aside my crucifix, image of Christ crucified, Christ atoning, and I began to make a different cross, a plain, pure cross, an image of faith and hope—THE CROSS OF THE RESURRECTION—and then as I became one with the risen Christ, Christ redeemed, Christ liberated, I knew my long Good Friday was over at last and the sun was finally dawning on my long-awaited Easter Day.²¹

Thus not only Christ crucified, but the resurrected Christ becomes symbolic of Darrow's entire life's journey and his process of conversion. Later, when he enters the chapel in the woods that becomes the venue for his new ministry, he ponders the Platonic absolute values of Beauty, Truth, and Goodness which he finds symbolized there. In his thinking, he substitutes the Christian value of Love for Platonic Goodness, and once again he refers to the images of "Christ crucified, Christ resurrected, the old life giving way to the new" as the symbols of his life experience and his conversion.²²

Neville Aysgarth, on the other hand, embodies the theology of the liberal Protestant Modernist. As such, the immanence of God is foremost in his theology; God is seen as working in and through the natural laws of science. He expresses the belief he holds to Mellors, a clergyman in trouble, who has preached a few modernist doctrines that he really does not believe but that arouse controversy in his parish. Aysgarth explains "true Modernism" to Mellors in these terms:

Ah well...if you make the mistake of seeing God as utterly transcendent, a remote force which shoots off the occasional impossibility whenever it chooses to do so,

²¹ Ibid. 99. Notably absent on the cross of the resurrection is the body of the crucified Christ. In his dream this plain wooden cross symbolizes Darrow's movement from his guilt-ridden life of atonement in the monastery to a new life and ministry outside the cloister.

²² Ibid. 193.

then of course you'll wind up by deciding He's above the laws of science and you'll be seeing miracles everywhere. But the Modernists prefer to think of God as immanent in the world, working through the laws of science and nature. They believe that if only one can dispose of this archaic and unhelpful model of the transcendent God, one can form a theology which is far more pertinent to the mid-twentieth century.²³

It is noteworthy that Aysgarth's God is much closer to us than Darrow's. However, Mellors retorts that this makes God "wallowing around in this disgusting pig-sty with us." Instead, Mellors maintains that human beings "want a God up above the mess who can lean down and haul us out of it!"²⁴ To this Aysgarth replies:

But it seems to me that people who harp on a transcendent God always end up by undervaluing the importance of Christ. If one keeps in mind that the Incarnation symbolizes God's immanence among humanity--²⁵

Aysgarth's Christology is firmly rooted in the Incarnation. However, Mellors remains dissatisfied with Aysgarth's "benign God" who is dressed up in Christ's clothes and reduced to a mundane human level. He then challenges Aysgarth's statement that "God is love" by stating:

Sometimes love requires harshness and firmness—and yes, even brutality too. What use is a parent who doesn't care enough to discipline a child who goes wrong? Of course the Modernists say no one ever goes wrong, they deny the existence of sin...²⁶

Aysgarth corrects Mellors once again by stating that Modernists do not "deny the existence of sin... They simply say we should consider wrong-doing in the light of modern psychology and sociology."²⁷ To this Mellors replies:

They can consider evil in whatever light they please, but they'll never alter the basic fact that we're all sinners—and we're all under judgement! We all need to be redeemed, and contrary to what you Modernists think, redemption isn't to be

²³ Susan Howatch, Ultimate Prizes 343.

²⁴ Ibid. 343.

²⁵ Ibid. 343.

²⁶ Ibid. 343.

²⁷ Ibid. 343.

had by sidling up to God with a winsome smile and lisping: “Excuse me, Lord, I think I’ll repent now—can I have my ration of sweetness and light, please?” The road to redemption is decked in blood, sweat and tears, not in moonlight, red roses and a bunch of angels twanging harps!²⁸

In this exchange with Mellors, Aysgarth presents his liberal Protestant Modernist beliefs.

These affect his conversion in Lonergan’s terms and also illustrate the Christological doctrine to which he subscribes. Because he believes that God is immanent in the world and present as a divine spark in every human being, he downplays the effect of sin.

Instead, Aysgarth emphasizes the basic goodness of humankind.²⁹ His penchant to view sin in light of its psychological and sociological roots tends to make him rationalize and justify his own sins; however, this trend is forestalled when he is under the guidance of a spiritual director. In fact, his Low Church stance makes him devalue the need for auricular confession;³⁰ in spite of this tendency, when he is facing a crisis, he is aware of his need to seek help from another discerning person. By analyzing the psychological and sociological causes of his sinfulness under the guidance of a spiritual director such as Aidan Lucas, the Abbot of Ruydale, for example, Aysgarth arrives at the truth of his situation and ways in which he can atone for his sins.³¹ This aids in furthering his intellectual and moral conversion in Lonergan’s terms.

The Christology that Aysgarth embraces finds its basis in the Incarnation. This is not surprising since, as he says, this doctrine “symbolizes God’s immanence among humanity.”³² The key word here is “symbolizes.” In this context, the word tends to

²⁸ Ibid. 343-344.

²⁹ Ibid. 58.

³⁰ Ibid. 56.

³¹ Ibid. 232. Referred to Aidan Lucas by Jon Darrow, Aysgarth is compelled by the elder monk to recognize his sins, although his own inclination is still to rationalize them away.

³² See page 235 of this chapter for the entire quotation.

dilute the uniqueness of Christ as the one and only God-Man. Christ becomes merely a symbol of God's presence among us, not its reality, and thus his divinity is undermined.

This having been said, there are at least three instances in the novel Ultimate Prizes when Aysgarth understands Christ to be incarnated through the compassion and presence of another human being. The first occurs after Aysgarth has confessed his guilt to Aidan Lucas regarding his first wife Grace. As the elderly monk places his hand over his, Aysgarth thinks:

I knew that Christ, the resurrected Christ, not the Jesus of history but the Christ of Eternity, had moved through the closed door of the room to be again at one with his disciples. He was contained in the compassion which now encircled me and in the sharing of the suffering.³³

As has already been noted in Chapter One and Chapter Four,³⁴ a second instance in the novel when Christ is incarnated occurs through Aysgarth's actions toward the German prisoners of war on Starbury Plain. Eddie Hoffenberg's letter of commendation, which is signed by all the prisoners, demonstrates to Bishop Bell that Aysgarth's compassion is nothing less than the incarnation of Christ for those to whom he ministers. Lastly, when Ashworth thunders that God was absent "absolutely, utterly and completely" in the German prisoner of war camp where he was held, Aysgarth reminds him that Christ was incarnated there as well. He says to his distressed adversary Ashworth:

He couldn't have been absent if you, a man of God, were there. The fact that you thought he was absent was your nightmare, your cross, but it was a delusion. He's there in every private crucifixion because he's a crucified God. Why, the very fact of the Incarnation means—³⁵

³³ Susan Howatch, Ultimate Prizes 257. See Chapter Four, page 198 for the complete quotation in which Aysgarth tells how Aidan Lucas embodied the compassionate Christ for him.

³⁴ See Chapter One, page 40 for the entire quotation from the letter of commendation written by Eddie Hoffenberg praising Aysgarth for his ministry among the German prisoners of war. Chapter Four, page 192 also refers to this letter.

³⁵ Susan Howatch, Ultimate Prizes 362.

For Aysgarth, Christ is the God of the Incarnation who continues to be incarnated in the charity and compassion human beings shower on each other. This Christological orientation promotes Aysgarth's religious conversion because it leads to what Lonergan calls the "charity of the suffering servant...self-sacrificing love."³⁶

In speaking of Charles Ashworth as a conservative orthodox theologian and a churchman of the Middle Way several facts must be mentioned. At the very beginning of Glittering Images, the first novel of the series, Ashworth is in the middle of writing his second book. He is interrupted by a phone call from Archbishop Lang, but not before he has written the following: "Modalism appealed to the Church's desire for monotheism, but in the second half of the fourth century it was propounded that the modalist God metamorphosed himself to meet"³⁷-- Like this unfinished sentence, a full understanding of Charles Ashworth's Christology and churchmanship is somewhat truncated in the novels and must be inferred from either the opinion of the other characters or from his own meager statements on the matter. Eddie Hoffenberg, for instance, mentions this difficulty when he is speaking to Venetia Flaxton about the rift between the Dean of the Cathedral, Aysgarth, and the Bishop of Starbridge, Ashworth. He states: "Charles is the kind of priest who's difficult to classify: his churchmanship's middle-of-the-road, but he can preach like an Evangelical once he gets going on sin and he's as fervent about confessions as any Anglo-Catholic."³⁸

One can infer from the topic of the book he is writing and from what Ashworth says to Alex Jardine--"I happen to find Arianism and Modalism more stimulating than

³⁶ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 117.

³⁷ Susan Howatch, Glittering Images 4.

³⁸ Susan Howatch, Scandalous Risks 367-368.

the Oxford Movement”³⁹--that his theological convictions lie in the classical discussions of Christ’s divinity. In fact, when Jardine presses Ashworth to answer the following question: “I refer to the search for the historical Jesus—do you think we can ever see beyond the shining image of the Gospels to the man he really was?” Ashworth replies:

I think it can be unproductive to probe behind glittering images...and with all due respect I believe your generation has been too preoccupied with Christ’s humanity at the expense of his divinity.⁴⁰

The exchange which follows locates Ashworth within the very heart of neo-orthodox belief. Jardine asks:

You think that in pursuing the concept of the immanence of God in mankind we’ve wound up losing sight of God and following mankind, as represented by Christ, down a historical blind alley?⁴¹

To this Ashworth replies:

“Exactly. Speaking for myself, I’m much more interested in the modern doctrines asserting God’s transcendence and the importance of revelation—I think we should focus on the message Christ presented, not on the shadowy figure behind the glittering image,” ... and escaping with profound relief into the world of scholarship I began to talk of the writings of Karl Barth and the challenge of Crisis theology.⁴²

Emphasizing the transcendence of God in this way puts Ashworth in direct opposition theologically with Jardine and his protégé, Neville Aysgarth. As has already been shown, Ashworth confronts Aysgarth’s strong belief in the immanence of God once again when the two clash over whether God was absent in the German prisoner of war camp where

³⁹ Susan Howatch, Glittering Images 36. The Christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries were concerned with the person or nature of Christ. The heresy Modalism denied the existence of three persons in God; accordingly, God is one person who has manifested himself under three modes at different times: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Son is, therefore, a “mode” of the Father. Arianism, on the other hand, viewed Jesus as a divine being created by God. Thus Jesus was not considered co-eternal with the Father. See Oscar Cullmann, Christology of the New Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963) 3ff.

⁴⁰ Susan Howatch, Glittering Images 37-38.

⁴¹ Ibid. 38.

⁴² Ibid. 38.

the former was held.⁴³ Still, by the conclusion of Absolute Truths, Ashworth himself has grown into a more compassionate human being, thus illustrating his growing acceptance of Aysgarth's immanent God incarnated not only in the Christ but also in human beings' charitable actions toward one another.⁴⁴

Nor is Ashworth comfortable at first with Darrow's mystical stance. He ponders how his view of mysticism is changing during the course of his first stay at the monastery in Grantchester when he goes to seek Darrow's help:

By that time my new examination of mysticism had advanced from Evelyn Underhill to Dean Inge and Baron Friedrich von Hügel, and as my reading progressed, I was both amazed and ashamed by the shallowness of my knowledge. Having long since decided that I preferred to work in the less spiritually demanding sphere of historical facts, I had tended to view mysticism merely as a recurring phenomenon which broke out, like a religious version of measles, whenever orthodox ecclesiastical life became sunk in abuse and inertia. Perhaps also I had felt that the morbid, aberrant aspects of mysticism made it suitable for study only by women, emotional adolescents, and eccentrics and this prejudice had blinded me to the value of a true mysticism stripped of Oriental nihilism and Roman superstition.⁴⁵

The fact that Ashworth is open to modifying his view of mysticism demonstrates not only his malleability in altering his beliefs on the subject, but also his capacity to surrender to the conversion he experiences.

Ashworth's acceptance of all three theological stances within the church occurs at the end of the novel Absolute Truths and it represents his conversion in iconic terms.

Thus he thinks:

We stood there in our ecclesiastical triangle, the conservative, the liberal and the mystic—the Catholic, the Protestant and the churchman from the Middle Way—

⁴³ Susan Howatch, Ultimate Prizes 362. See this chapter, page 237 for Aysgarth's complete statement to Ashworth on this subject.

⁴⁴ Elaine Lux makes this point in "The Expanding 'I' in Absolute Truths," Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch 77. Also see Chapter Four, page 220 for the profound Christological statement in which Ashworth insists on the centrality of Christ as the symbol of God's "agonizing involvement with his creation" and "God's creative promise to redeem and renew."

⁴⁵ Susan Howatch, Glittering Images 210.

three strands of one tradition forming a single band of light, and then as if we all became aware of our final creative alignment at exactly the same moment, we reached out to clasp one another's hands.⁴⁶

Ashworth here recognizes and accepts the basic unity underlying the diversity of the different stances within the Anglican Church.

5.4. The Effects of Sin in the Process of Conversion

Before Lonergan speaks of sin directly in Method in Theology, he treats the idea of faith in human beings as its remedy. Thus he says that faith is knowledge born of love, the love of God flooding our hearts. Through faith we apprehend not only transcendent value but also our own self-transcendence and our orientation toward the source of love which is God. Faith eventually moves us to decide whether we will love God in return, or not, and whether we will seek the originating value which is God or terminal value which is the human good that man achieves. According to Lonergan, furthermore,

Faith recognizes that God grants men [and women] their freedom, that he wills them to be persons and not just automata, that he calls them to the higher authenticity that overcomes evil with good. So faith is linked with human progress and it has to meet the challenge of human decline.⁴⁷

By decline here Lonergan means sin in all its ideological representations that disrupt culture and that “breed resentment, hatred, anger, [and] violence.” Only religious faith which bears fruit in love can free human beings from the prison of sin and ideology, and Lonergan expresses this brilliantly. Thus he writes unequivocally:

If passions are to quiet down, if wrongs are not to be exacerbated, not ignored, not merely palliated, but acknowledged and removed, then human possessiveness and human pride have to be replaced by religious charity, by the charity of the

⁴⁶ Susan Howatch, Absolute Truths 595.

⁴⁷ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 117.

suffering servant, by self-sacrificing love. Men [and women] are sinners. If human progress is not to be ever distorted and destroyed by the inattention, oversights, irrationality, irresponsibility of decline, men [and women] have to be reminded of their sinfulness. They have to acknowledge their real guilt and amend their ways. They have to learn with humility that religious development is dialectical, that the task of repentance and conversion is life-long.⁴⁸

According to Lonergan, then, conversion is the end of a lengthy process that is marked by sin and repentance.

What Lonergan is articulating in these statements on faith, love, and sin captures the ebb and flow in the lives of Jon Darrow, Neville Aysgarth, and Charles Ashworth as Susan Howatch depicts them on the pages of the novels in the Starbridge series. Indeed, Lonergan demonstrates in these statements not only the dialectical nature of sin and repentance as a life-long process of conversion, but also the need to replace sinful actions with those engendered by Christian charity. The experiences of each of the three main characters treated in this dissertation present an illustration of this life-long process of conversion and the continual movement toward a more charitable way of being.

For instance, early in the novel, Glamorous Powers, Jon Darrow confesses to Francis Ingram, the Abbot General of the Fordites, the sins he has committed with regard to his first wife Betty and his two children with her, Martin and Ruth. He remembers truthfully how he felt in this marriage:

My marriage was hell...I hated my life as a husband. I was miserable, isolated, trapped with this woman who hadn't the faintest idea what my life was about. Sexual intimacy was the only compensation and even that in the end became a mockery underlining my loneliness. But the real nightmare was that this tragedy was all my fault. Betty was a nice girl in her own way and she tried hard to be a good wife. She really did love me—but I couldn't love her, not after the romantic passion was gone, and of course she came to realise that. ...If I hadn't gone away to sea the marriage couldn't have survived, but at sea I could recuperate until I had the strength to face another harrowing spell ashore—oh, what hell it was!

⁴⁸ Ibid. 117-118.

And all the time I felt cut off from God by my failure to love as I should. I was in despair.⁴⁹

Thus incapable of loving his wife and having effectually abandoned her, Darrow suffers tremendous guilt, especially after Betty dies. He then tries to assuage his guilt in his wife's regard by becoming an exemplary father to his children. However, he explains to Francis:

I should have applied to work ashore so that I could be at home with them [his children]...but I couldn't face the thought of either my mother-in-law or a hired woman keeping house for me, destroying my psychic space—and worse still I knew I wouldn't be able to cope with the children, all the noise, all the mess, all the emotional demands—I couldn't do it, I just couldn't do it, I wanted to but it was beyond me.⁵⁰

Darrow admits that this situation merely increases his guilt which in turn further inhibits him in loving his children. However, the effect of these sins of selfishness and the guilt they engender cause Darrow to enter the cloister as atonement for them. Then, when he finally acknowledges these sins in Ingram's presence, he is made to understand that he must leave the monastery. Thus first these sins actually bring about the deepening of Darrow's spiritual life and the advancement of his conversion through his giving of himself in service as a monk. Then later in life, acknowledging and confessing these sins help him discern the next step in his life's journey, that is, a return to the world, which presents a whole other venue in which he can do God's will in the service of others and continue furthering his process of conversion.⁵¹

Darrow confesses another sin to Francis Ingram much later in Glamorous Powers.

⁴⁹ Susan Howatch, Glamorous Powers 106.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 106-107.

⁵¹ Inge, the theologian whose thoughts underpin those of Jon Darrow, writes that "sin shows itself in self-consciousness, self-will, and self-seeking," as, indeed, Darrow illustrates here, and the opposite of this, "obedience [to God] unto death" is its remedy. See William Ralph Inge, Personal Idealism and Mysticism (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1924) 176-178.

After the healing-service-gone-wrong, but prior to Anne's miscarriage, Darrow finally admits to and reveals the hatred he has harbored toward his deceased father for so long. There are several reasons why Darrow has hated his father. First, he required his son to be a replica of himself;⁵² second, he failed to summon the boy when his mother was dying;⁵³ third, he hid his true self behind a mask that was always "good, kind, decent" and "never complaining";⁵⁴ and fourth, he remarried, proving his disloyalty to his son's mother.⁵⁵ Having admitted his sin of hatred for his father, Darrow can finally move on humbly to face his own dying infant son and face, too, his grieving wife with consummate compassion. The sin and his repenting of it liberate him to forgive both his father and himself and to act more charitably toward others, in this case, his dying infant son and his wife Anne. Thus once again, as Lonergan has indicated, sin and subsequent repentance help to further the process of Darrow's conversion.

Neville Aysgarth's life also illustrates Lonergan's depiction of conversion as a life-long dialectical process that moves between sin and repentance and that leads to religious charity. At the beginning of the novel Ultimate Prizes, Aysgarth admits to himself that he has fallen in love with Dido Tallent while he is still married to Grace. His grand passion for Dido even makes him question whether he was ever in love with Grace at all. Thus he muses:

Automatically I started recalling my seven-year courtship of Grace, but although I had embarked on that period of my life in a fever of calf-love, my feelings had matured into a solid reliable devotion and I had never experienced the suspension of my rational faculties...In fact in the light of my present madness I was almost tempted to wonder if I had ever really loved Grace at all—but that was an insane thought which only indicated the disintegration of my reason. Of course I had

⁵² Ibid. 349.

⁵³ Ibid. 351.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 350.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 352.

loved Grace. I had adored her. She had been exactly the kind of wife I knew I had to have.⁵⁶

Despite his love for his wife Grace, Aysgarth continues to harbor a deep, passionate desire for Dido. Grace herself indicates that she is aware of Aysgarth's feelings for Dido when, on her death bed, she says to him: "She'd [Dido] never care for the children."⁵⁷ Much later, in the novel Ultimate Prizes, Aysgarth faces the pain of the guilt he bears for having been unfaithful in his heart toward Grace. He remembers "Grace, that innocent victim who had been so wounded by my infidelity that she had been drained of the will to live," and he feels as if he is drowning in his grief and shame.⁵⁸

It is not until much later in the novel Ultimate Prizes after he has married her that Aysgarth comes to understand the real reason why he fell so in love with Dido. At Darrow's insistence, he goes to visit her in the hospital and he contemplates:

As soon as I walked into Dido's flower-filled room I experienced yet again that eerie phenomenon of *déjà vu* and saw so clearly that this was no inexplicable delusion. I felt as if the scene had taken place before because it had indeed taken place before, over and over again in the past which had so tormented me. I looked at the pathetic, tragic invalid who loved me and saw not my wife but the mother I had so hideously mistreated. And then I saw the road to redemption.⁵⁹

By devoting his life to making Dido happy and caring for her in the present and in the future, Aysgarth discovers a way to atone for his past sins with regard to his mother.⁶⁰

Thus his sin leads to his repentance and atonement which involves Aysgarth in actions

⁵⁶ Susan Howatch, Ultimate Prizes 83.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 95.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 257.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 419.

⁶⁰ Susan Howatch, Absolute Truths 576. Aysgarth confesses to Ashworth the reason for his unfailing devotion to Dido, his atonement for the sins he committed against his mother.

that are more charitable, in this case, toward his second wife Dido. In this way, his process of conversion deepens and moves forward.⁶¹

Aysgarth also recalls another time in his life when sin and repentance led to atonement and charity. He refers to his relationship with the young Venetia Flaxton as he continues his confession to Ashworth toward the end of Absolute Truths:

That was why 1963 was a disaster for me. I lost touch with reality and failed to look after Dido. Of course I can see now I was suffering from years of strain—but I don't want to make excuses for myself, and I don't want you to think I'm complaining about my marriage either. It's the proof that even my most horrific mistakes can be redeemed and transformed into something of value. I have my children and I have a wife who loves me. I'm immensely fortunate and privileged.⁶²

Among other things, the “disaster” to which Aysgarth refers here is his relationship with Venetia Flaxton. Not only had this *liaison* left the young woman spiritually and emotionally bereft, it had also been a distraction that led Aysgarth away from his acknowledged purpose in life, caring for Dido. However, shortly before he dies, Aysgarth writes to Venetia asking to see her. When they meet, he expresses his desire to atone for his actions in her regard. He confesses:

My darling Venetia...do you think I never realized, as I listened to the gossip on the grapevine, that I ruined you? And do you really think that I—with my deep horror of destroying women—could ever die in peace unless I had made some attempt, no matter how feeble, to put right the great wrong that I've done?⁶³

⁶¹ Charles E. Raven, The Cross and the Crisis (London: The Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1940) 25 states that the “heart of the Gospel” is “that you can overcome evil, but only on Christ's terms, and by Christ's way, and at Christ's cost—on His terms, by His way, at the cost which He was prepared to pay.” Thus as the theologian on whose ideas those of Aysgarth are based, Raven describes the process of sin, repentance, and conversion, a movement from self-seeking to self-giving, that Aysgarth himself undergoes.

⁶² Ibid. 576.

⁶³ Susan Howatch, Scandalous Risks 456.

During this encounter with Venetia, Aysgarth shares an image with her, that of Holman Hunt's painting, "The Light of the World."⁶⁴ At the very conclusion to the novel Scandalous Risks, this image plays itself out in Venetia's experience and the scene suggests that redemption lies in her future as well.⁶⁵ Thus Aysgarth's sin with regard to Venetia prompts his repentance that leads to atonement amid his charitable actions toward her. Once again, his response to his sin has served to help him continue in his process of conversion.

Ashworth, too, experiences the effects of sin, the repentance that follows that leads to atonement, and the movement toward charitable actions.⁶⁶ Subsequent to his second wife Lyle's death, he reads her journal and discovers there the truth not only about Lyle, but about himself as well. This knowledge allows him to understand how he has sinned with regard to Lyle. Ashworth thinks:

I knew I had glimpsed this true self [Lyle's] repeatedly during the years of our marriage, but in the end I had done nothing to help her foster it and achieve fulfillment. I had been too busy with my theology and my bishopric. I had been too busy with my absolute truths. I, the strong militant Christian leader whose business it was to steer the members of my flock towards the destiny to which they had been called by God, had allowed the person closest to me to struggle on alone towards her own special fulfillment of the spirit. I had been so preoccupied

⁶⁴ Ibid. 459. In this painting, Christ stands at a door that has no latch, and knocks. The "door" symbolizes the human heart where the "latch" is on the inside. William Kupersmith and Jan S. Waples offer a detailed description of this painting in light of Venetia's experience in their article "Scandalous Risks: Sex, Scandal, and Spirituality in the Sixties" in Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch 212-214.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 466. In 1988, twenty-five years after Venetia's affair with Aysgarth, Nicholas Darrow stretches out his hand to her from behind the door of Starbridge Cathedral. Her journey to redemption through therapy, recovery from her addiction to alcohol, and embarking on her university career is recounted in The Wonder Worker, the first of Susan Howatch's St. Benet's Healing Centre novels. William Kupersmith and Jan S. Waples point this out in "Scandalous Risks: Sex, Scandal, and Spirituality in the Sixties" in Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch 214. See also Elizabeth Edwards in "The 'Hidden' Agenda: Feminist Perspectives in the Starbridge Novels" in Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch 181-182.

⁶⁶ Austin Farrer, Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited (London: Collins, 1962) 160 states: "As for the many harms that sin has done, and built into the fabric of the world, he [God] inspires human hands to correct what human hands have perpetrated." Thus Farrer, the theologian on whose thoughts Ashworth's are based, recognizes the path from sin to repentance and atonement.

with laying down God's laws that I had been blind to the work of the Holy Spirit which had been going on under my nose.⁶⁷

After gaining this understanding of himself, the grief-stricken Ashworth embarks on what he calls a "journey into chaos"⁶⁸ which precipitates several bouts of hard drinking⁶⁹ and an episode where he finds himself lost in a red-light district. Once there he considers his position honestly:

Unsavory people loitered, and as I paused to make a fresh attempt to get my bearings I was accosted by a prostitute. I moved on, but almost at once stopped dead with horror. It had dawned on me that a prostitute was in fact exactly what I wanted at that moment: complete anonymity, a temporary escape from unbearable pain and no possibility of apocalyptic consequences.⁷⁰

Somehow Ashworth succeeds in extricating himself from this seedy part of the city, but not before he remembers Desmond Wilton, a wayward priest, who had been discovered in similar circumstances. Finally, he manages to walk into Pimlico, a respectable district, where he goes to visit Sheila Preston, the widow of the late Bishop of Radbury. What might have been a casual afternoon tea with Sheila actually turns into a means for Ashworth to further numb the pain of his bereavement. Much later, he ponders his actions toward Sheila:

There followed, as I can see now, a very typical episode of casual sex, and I cannot, in all honesty, dress it up by saying I "made love" to Sheila. This is because the episode had nothing to do with love and almost nothing to do with Sheila; ...And it was certainly not "natural" either for me to use a woman as a painkiller of only slightly more significance than a couple of aspirins. I liked women; for me to treat a woman as a mere convenient object was contrary not only to my religious beliefs but to my nature.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Susan Howatch, Absolute Truths 198.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 200.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 201; 209.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 310.

⁷¹ Ibid. 324.

Ashworth's personal descent into chaos and sin and his subsequent repentance lead him later to regard "sinners" like Martin Darrow⁷² and Desmond Wilton⁷³ not with judgment but with understanding and compassion. In this way his conversion according to Lonergan's theory continues and deepens.

Perhaps the supreme moment when Ashworth admits his guilt occurs toward the conclusion of Absolute Truths when he is in the presence of Aysgarth and Darrow.

Aysgarth has just confessed his own guilt with regard to the shady financial deal he had fabricated in order to care for Dido when Ashworth says:

But don't think I don't understand what you've been through and don't think I feel no responsibility for what you've suffered. I should never have washed my hands of you so completely after the disasters of 1963. I should never have treated you with such anger and contempt and turned my back. That wasn't following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. That was following in the footsteps of Pontius Pilate.⁷⁴

This humble attitude on the part of Ashworth indicates his repentance with regard to his dealings with Aysgarth in the past and his desire to atone for his actions. In addition, his admission creates the following atmosphere in which these former enemies can now encounter and understand each other:

A stillness descended upon the room, and in the heart of that stillness was something beyond the power of mere language to describe. I felt we were being given a glimpse of the underlying unity of all things, and that this harmony—though no metaphor was adequate to describe that singing silence—was enfolding us so that we were wholly in tune not only with one another but with a healing presence at the very centre of our being.⁷⁵

Ashworth's confession has transcended individual repentance here and created a new venue in which Aysgarth and he can interact from this point onward. His process of

⁷² Ibid. 334-335. Martin is the elder son of Jon Darrow; he is a recovering alcoholic and a homosexual.

⁷³ Ibid. 346-347.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 587.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 588.

conversion thus reaches a whole new level and affects Aysgarth in his conversion experience as well. As noted already in Chapter Three,⁷⁶ although it bears repeating here, Bernard Lonergan refers to this kind of “collective” conversion when he writes:

Conversion is existential, intensely personal, utterly intimate. But it is not so private as to be solitary. It can happen to many, and they can form a community to sustain one another in their self-transformation and to help one another in working out the implications and fulfilling the promise of their new life.⁷⁷

As a result of his confession before Aysgarth, Ashworth can now stand with his former enemy, not against him, in that “harmony” and “singing silence” which enfolds them and effects the healing of them both.

This new rapport that is prompted by Ashworth’s confession to Aysgarth also represents a slight shift in his thinking about sin. As the proponent of conservative orthodoxy, Ashworth has maintained a decidedly rigid perspective on the matter. For instance, when the new liberal Bishop of Radbury, Leslie Sunderland, asks: “are we Christians or aren’t we? Shouldn’t one love and accept people instead of persecuting and condemning them?” Ashworth retorts:

Of course we must love people no matter what they’ve done, but we mustn’t forget that love should include justice for those who have been wronged by the sins of others—you can’t just pretend that sin doesn’t matter! Sin hurts people, sin destroys lives—haven’t you yourself ever suffered as a result of the wrong acts of others?⁷⁸

In addition, in the novel Scandalous Risks, when Ashworth is dictating his manuscript

⁷⁶ See page 116 above for Lonergan’s full explanation of “collective” conversion.

⁷⁷ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 130.

⁷⁸ Susan Howatch, Absolute Truths 122-123.

opposing John A. T. Robinson's new morality,⁷⁹ he once again demonstrates

his strict conservative view regarding morality with these four points:

Number One: Dr. Robinson is attempting to apply the principle of *Situationethik*--...this theory parts company with the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church...

Number Two: The Bishop writes as if Christianity were no more than a weak love ethic...but it is also about salvation and redemption...

Number Three: The Bishop theorises a great deal about human relationships but seems to have only the sketchiest idea about how his theories would work in practice...

Number Four: The Bishop tells us we find God in loving relationships. Certainly we do. But supposing someone, through no fault of his own, has no loving relationships in his life; are we to say that in his loneliness he has no access to God?⁸⁰

Ashworth's views reflected in these statements challenge what Aysgarth expresses in his adherence to John Robinson's liberal ideas in Honest to God. According to this perspective,⁸¹ Aysgarth explains to Venetia Flaxton:

It means that if you love God—which is the purest, noblest sort of love—you should be able to love your fellowmen in the same way and then the love will both protect you from sin and steer you into the paths of righteousness. 'Love God and do what you will' thus becomes 'Love God and you'll automatically do the right thing'—and Robinson's relating that principle to what the Germans call *Situationethik*: he's saying that in moral dilemmas there are no hard and fast rules and that each situation should be regarded as unique; he's saying that love—the best kind of love—should be the only guiding light in seeking a resolution of moral problems.⁸²

From a liberal perspective, Aysgarth (i.e. Robinson) emphasizes love in every individual situation, minus any prescribed laws and minus the effects of sin, as the guiding principle

⁷⁹ John A. T. Robinson, Honest to God (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963) 115 defines the new morality in these terms: "Love alone, because, as it were, it has a built-in moral compass, enabling it to 'home' intuitively upon the deepest need of the other, can allow itself to be directed completely by the situation. It alone can afford to be utterly open to the situation, or rather to the person in the situation, uniquely and for his/her own sake, without losing its direction or unconditionality. It is able to embrace an ethic of radical responsiveness, meeting every situation on its own merits, with no prescriptive laws."

⁸⁰ Susan Howatch, Scandalous Risks 413-415.

⁸¹ Aysgarth's viewpoint has been introduced already in Chapter Two, page 88. This is a more complete quotation of his views.

⁸² Susan Howatch, Scandalous Risks 165.

of all human interaction. As a conservative, on the other hand, Ashworth insists on the effects of sin in every human situation; nor does he renege on the belief that there are some acts which are *de facto* wrong, regardless of the situation. However, after he himself has succumbed to the influence of sin, Ashworth can regard any sinner less judgmentally and more compassionately. He has not abandoned his conservative view of sin, but simply softened it with understanding, forgiveness, and Christian charity.

In considering the positive and negative effects of sin in each character's life, one general comment must be made. At this point, it is well to recall what Lonergan has written: "If human progress is not to be ever distorted and destroyed by the inattention, oversights, irrationality, irresponsibility of decline, men [and women] have to be reminded of their sinfulness."⁸³ In the Starbridge series, when each main character succumbs to the effects of sin in his life, he requires and seeks another person to help him acknowledge his sin, repent of it, and move on to a more charitable way of being. Each character, in other words, has a mentor or a confessor with whom he confers: Jon Darrow had the late Father Darcy,⁸⁴ followed by Francis Ingram; Neville Aysgarth has Jon Darrow who then refers him to Aidan Lucas; and Charles Ashworth has Jon Darrow. When confronted with his sin, each character under the guidance of his confessor, takes the necessary time to reflect on what he has done, why he has done it, and how he will move forward replacing the sin with self-sacrificing love. This process requires that the character delve into his past and analyze the relationships which have helped to form

⁸³ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 117.

⁸⁴ Although he does not appear in the time period of the novels, Father Darcy's presence is felt in the effect he has had on Jon Darrow and Francis Ingram in particular. Howatch carefully portrays Darcy in a balanced manner, demonstrating his strengths and his sinful flaws, just as she does her three main characters.

him, especially the relationships he has forged with his biological father and mother and with those who have acted in their stead. From this analysis each character acquires a new perspective on himself and on those significant others who have shaped his identity. He then can move forward in the process of conversion that Lonergan states is life-long.

5.5. The Church of England as Venue for Conversion

Within society Lonergan envisions individuals, groups, and organizations “that labor to persuade people to intellectual, moral, and religious conversion and that work systematically to undo the mischief brought about by alienation and ideology.”⁸⁵ Such is the task that Lonergan allots to the Christian church. He further characterizes the Christian church as

the community that results from the outer communication of Christ’s message and from the inner gift of God’s love. Since God can be counted on to bestow his grace, practical theology is concerned with the effective communication of Christ’s message.

The message announces what Christians are to believe, what they are to become, what they are to do. Its meaning, then, is at once cognitive, constitutive, effective. It is cognitive inasmuch as the message tells what is to be believed. It is constitutive inasmuch as it crystallizes the hidden inner gift of love into overt Christian fellowship. It is effective inasmuch as it directs Christian service to human society to bring about the kingdom of God.⁸⁶

It is clear from this statement that we are dealing here with the eighth functional specialty communications. “Practical theology” or “the effective communication of Christ’s message” thus becomes the mission of the Church. According to Lonergan, any individual who seeks to communicate the Christian message must first know what this message is. To this end familiarity with the seven functional specialties—research,

⁸⁵ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 361.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 361-362.

interpretation, history, dialectic, foundations, doctrines, and systematics—can aid in giving one knowledge of the message. Secondly, in order to communicate the constitutive meaning of the Christian message, one must live it, or in some way participate in Christian fellowship. Lastly, to communicate the effective meaning of the Christian message, one must practice it, or be involved in service to human society for, as Lonergan maintains: “actions speak louder than words, while preaching what one does not practise recalls sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.”⁸⁷

Moreover, Lonergan recognizes the diversity of cultures and languages among the people to whom the Christian message will be communicated. He insists that those who share the Christian message do so from within the culture and language of the people they are addressing. In this way “the Christian message becomes, not disruptive of the culture, not an alien patch superimposed upon it, but a line of development within the culture.”⁸⁸

In his discussion of the church, Lonergan arrives at a re-formulated definition of it. Thus the church is a fully conscious, structured, outgoing, redemptive process of self-constitution within worldwide human society. To say that it is “structured” acknowledges the fact that the church does everything necessary and in an orderly way to promote the spiritual and cultural development of its members. As an “outgoing” process, the church is concerned not only with itself but with the whole of human society. Lonergan describes the church as a “redemptive” process in this way:

The Christian message, incarnate in Christ scourged and crucified, dead and risen, tells not only of God’s love but also of man’s sin. Sin is alienation from man’s authentic being, which is self-transcendence, and sin justifies itself by ideology. As alienation and ideology are destructive of community, so the self-sacrificing

⁸⁷ Ibid. 362.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 362.

love that is Christian charity reconciles alienated man to his true being, and undoes the mischief initiated by alienation and consolidated by ideology.⁸⁹

As a “fully conscious process of self-constitution,” the church will come to realize that theology is only a part of the full science of humankind and that it must “unite itself with all other relevant branches of human studies.”⁹⁰

In its process of integrating the various branches of human studies, the Church and those involved in other fields can follow the same method which Lonergan proposes for theology. When viewed as simply experience, understanding, and judgment, for instance, the functional specialties of research, interpretation, and history can be applied to any field of knowledge. Because scholars and scientists, like theologians, will not always agree, the functional specialty of dialectic will organize positions and counter-positions, while that of foundations will decide which are the real positions and which are the counter-positions in any field. The use of dialectic as a way of weeding out alienation and ideology from their own work will also give social scientists and historians a keener eye to recognize alienation and ideology in the processes they are studying.

The functional specialties of doctrines, systematics, and communication, then, correspond to policy making, planning, and execution of the plans. As Lonergan explains:

Policy is concerned with attitudes and ends. Planning works out the optimal use of existing resources for attaining the ends under given conditions. Execution generates feedback. This supplies scholars and scientists with the data for studies on the wisdom of policies and the efficacy of planning. The result of such attention to feedback will be that policy making and planning become ongoing processes that are continuously revised in the light of their consequences.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibid. 364.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 363-364.

⁹¹ Ibid. 365-366.

Forming policies, planning operations, and carrying them out are all part of the redemptive action of the church in the modern world. However, there is also a constructive side to Christian action which is inseparable from its redemptive work, for Lonergan writes: “one cannot undo evil without bringing about the good.” According to Lonergan, the constructive side of Christian action includes

the far more arduous task (1) of effecting an advance in scientific knowledge, (2) of persuading eminent and influential people to consider the advance both thoroughly and fairly, and (3) of having them convince practical policy makers and planners both that the advance exists and that it implies such and such revisions of current policies and planning with such and such effects.⁹²

In order for the Christian church to do all that Lonergan envisions, it is necessary that it be in a constant process of renewal itself. Thus the church

will remove from its action the widespread impression of complacent irrelevance and futility. It will bring theologians into close contact with experts in very many different fields. It will bring scientists and scholars into close contact with policy makers and planners and, through them, with clerical and lay workers engaged in applying solutions to the problems and finding ways to meet the needs of Christians and of all mankind.⁹³

When he speaks of the church, Lonergan also does not deny the fact that the church is divided, that, “there exist different confessions of faith” and “different notions of the church.” However, he also recognizes that there is a “real” and an “ideal” unity. He maintains that

The real unity is the response to the one Lord in the one Spirit. The ideal unity is the fruit of Christ’s prayer: “...may they all be one...” (John 17, 21) At the present time that fruit is ecumenism.⁹⁴

Lonergan notes that the division among the churches lies chiefly in the cognitive meaning of the Christian message, while the constitutive and effective meaning are matters on

⁹² Ibid. 366-367.

⁹³ Ibid. 367.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 367.

which most Christians agree. Until agreement can be found in the cognitive area, however, Lonergan suggests that collaboration is the best way in which the churches can proceed.

Susan Howatch depicts the Church of England in a way that is consonant with Lonergan's definition of the church as a fully conscious, structured, outgoing redemptive process of self-constitution.⁹⁵ According to Lonergan, the church is fully conscious when it recognizes that theology is only one branch of human knowledge and that it must unite itself with other relevant branches of human studies in order to become a fully conscious process of self-constitution. One example of this that occurs in several of the Starbridge novels is the use of psychological terminology to express Christian phenomena. For instance, when Lewis Hall, a very perceptive priest and confessor, is summoned to help Nicholas Darrow decipher a vision he has had, he recognizes Jungian language in the young man's way of speaking. Their exchange proceeds in this manner:

Lewis merely said: "I'm interested in the flexible way you use the word 'psyche.'"

"I've picked that up from my father. He uses it to describe the special force in each personality which varies from individual to individual and is as unique as a fingerprint. The psyche's related to the ego and the conscious mind, but essentially it's rooted in the inner self and so has access to the unconscious."

"The soul in action?"

"Something like that. All language is really so inadequate—"

"You favor Jungian terms, I notice."

"I suppose you disapprove."

"Why should I? Jung talks a language it would pay Christians to master. Have you ever heard of an Anglican priest and monk called Christopher Bryant?"⁹⁶ He's one of the Cowley Fathers, and he's interested in the possibility of a Jungian-Christian synthesis."⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Ibid. 363-364.

⁹⁶ See Chapter One, pages 23-31 for an analysis of Howatch's use of Bryant's theology in the Starbridge novels.

⁹⁷ Susan Howatch, *Mystical Paths* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1992) 290-291.

Although Nicholas attests that Jung is never mentioned at the Theological College, still there are theologians in reality, like Christopher Bryant, and fictional mystics, like Jon Darrow and Lewis Hall, in the Church of England who find the language of psychology illuminating to Christianity.

As a Liberal Modernist, Neville Aysgarth also believes “in interpreting Christianity in the light of modern knowledge.” Thus he writes in a letter to Dido Tallent, his young protégée, that “we welcome all scientific advances—in geology, anthropology, psychology, chemistry, physics and so on—and use them as a springboard to an expanded spiritual enlightenment.”⁹⁸ Although Liberal Modernism comprises only one stance within the Anglican Church, its recognition and use of other branches of human knowledge resonate with Lonergan’s definition of the church as being fully conscious.

Lonergan also states that the church is a structured process. As such

it trains personnel. It distinguishes roles and assigns to them tasks. It has developed already understood and accepted modes of cooperation. It promotes a good of order in which Christian needs are met regularly, sufficiently, efficiently. It facilitates the spiritual and cultural development of its members. It invites them to transform by Christian charity their personal and group relations. It rejoices in the terminal values that flow from their lives.⁹⁹

In essence this defines the scope of the Church of England as Susan Howatch illustrates it in the Starbridge novels. Not only is reference made to the Theological College in Starbridge, especially in relation to Jon Darrow’s accepting a teaching position there,¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Susan Howatch, *Ultimate Prizes* 57. As discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, Charles Earle Raven, whose theological ideas inform those of Aysgarth, believed that all forms of human activity must be tapped in order to discover the mysteries of the universe.

⁹⁹ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 363.

¹⁰⁰ Susan Howatch, *Glamorous Powers* 398-399.

but allusions to the “Benedictine scholarship” fostered at the monasteries of Starwater, Grantchester, and Ruydale also appear scattered throughout the novels.¹⁰¹ Through such institutions, the training of both diocesan priests and monks is secured. One also finds the delineation among the various orders of the church with regard to rank and duties. The laity concerns itself with the menial tasks of the local parish while receiving spiritual care and regular worship services from the parish curate.¹⁰² The Cathedral community is replete with Archdeacons who handle the administrative duties of a large geographical area,¹⁰³ the cathedral dean who manages the affairs of the cathedral,¹⁰⁴ and the bishop who pastorally oversees all of this.¹⁰⁵ Monks, like the fictional Fordites, provide spiritual guidance and counseling to those who seek their aid¹⁰⁶ while special healing ministries, such as that of Lewis Hall, serve the people who come to them with specific ailments.¹⁰⁷ As has been shown earlier in this chapter,¹⁰⁸ the spiritual and cultural development of individuals is fostered in the Church of England by the oversight of trained personnel, and individuals are urged in this way to turn from their sin, to move toward repentance and forgiveness, and to grow in Christian charity.

Howatch depicts the outgoing nature of the Anglican Church in several ways. For instance, Charles Ashworth, the conservative orthodox thinker, is acclaimed in

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 7.

¹⁰² Thus Jon Darrow returns “flexible and unobtrusive” to his curacy in Starrington Magna. Ibid. 394-395.

¹⁰³ For example, Aysgarth flexes his muscles as the Archdeacon overseeing the parish that Darrow desires to have as his curacy. Susan Howatch, Glamorous Powers 215-216.

¹⁰⁴ Fate conspires to obtain the honored position of Dean of Starbridge Cathedral, a Crown appointment, for Neville Aysgarth. Susan Howatch, Scandalous Risks 24-27.

¹⁰⁵ Ashworth confesses that he thinks he has failed at being a pastoral bishop to his flock. Susan Howatch, Absolute Truths 589.

¹⁰⁶ Ashworth describes his sessions with Jon Darrow, the Fordite monk. Susan Howatch, Glittering Images 206.

¹⁰⁷ Susan Howatch, Absolute Truths 609. Despite Lewis Hall’s flamboyant manner, Ashworth concedes that the Healing Centre under Hall’s direction is a success. After completing the Starbridge series, Susan Howatch also wrote a trilogy on the ministry of healing which is popularly known as the St. Benet’s series.

¹⁰⁸ See page 252 above for a discussion of the role of spiritual director in the conversion process.

theological circles because of his books on the early Christian heresies such as Arianism and Modalism.¹⁰⁹ Later in the series, in the novel Scandalous Risks, the historic and controversial publication of Honest to God by the Bishop of Woolwich, John A. T. Robinson, creates a storm of controversy over the reinterpretation of the Christian message for modern audiences. Once again Ashworth joins the fray by writing a rebuttal of Robinson's ideas which is published under the fictional title A Modern Heresy for Modern Man.¹¹⁰ What is lacking in the Starbridge series of novels is any reference to evangelistic or missionary activity outside the Church of England. Neville Aysgarth does involve himself in the pastoral care of German prisoners of war,¹¹¹ but this cannot be classified as evangelism, or as Lonergan might call the task geared toward, "the realization of the kingdom of God...in the whole of human society."¹¹²

That the Church of England fosters a redemptive process has been shown in the lives of the three main characters. Lonergan maintains that the redemptive process will occur in the church as a whole and in each of its parts as well as in society as a whole and in each of its parts. In Chapter One of this dissertation, the journey of Jon Darrow, Charles Ashworth, and Neville Aysgarth from sin through repentance, forgiveness, and redemption to resurrection and renewal was discussed in terms of Christopher Bryant's use of the three stages of mysticism: purgation, illumination, and union with God.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Susan Howatch, Glittering Images 4; 19.

¹¹⁰ Susan Howatch, Scandalous Risks 217-219. Ashworth outlines the contents of his book.

¹¹¹ Susan Howatch, Ultimate Prizes 285-286. In the words of Bishop Bell that Aysgarth shows to one of the prisoners are outlined the charitable duties of the church in wartime: "It must not hesitate...to condemn the infliction of reprisals, or the bombing of civilian populations...It should set itself against the propaganda of lies and hatred. It should be ready to encourage a resumption of friendly relations...It should set its face against any war of extermination or enslavement..."

¹¹² Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 364.

¹¹³ See Chapter One pages 24-31 for a presentation of this discussion based on Christopher Bryant's The Heart in Pilgrimage: Christian Guidelines for the Human Journey (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1994.)

Then in Chapter Four of this dissertation, an analysis of these three characters' experience was made in relation to Lonergan's life-long process of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. It was clear within Lonergan's scheme that when each main character was made to recognize his own sin, or "breakdown," in Lonergan's terms, with the help of his spiritual director, he repented, was forgiven, and then he sought to make reparation for his sin that then led to resurrection and renewal in his life and in the lives of those closest to him. In the context of this entire process, each character continued to progress in his intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. Thus the redemptive process of the entire church is shown to advance through the redemption of its individual members.

Most important of all, Susan Howatch depicts the Church of England as a place where theologians with positions and counter-positions may meet each other and in doing so further the redemptive process of the Church as a whole. According to Lonergan:

Positions and counter-positions are not just contradictory abstractions. They are to be understood concretely as opposed moments in ongoing process. They are to be apprehended in their proper dialectical character. Human authenticity is not some pure quality, some serene freedom from all oversights, all misunderstanding, all mistakes, all sins. Rather it consists in a withdrawal from unauthenticity, and the withdrawal is never a permanent achievement.¹¹⁴

Lonergan further characterizes human development as an ongoing process that is precarious at times because it is fraught with oversights, failures, mistakes and even sins. It is a process imbued throughout with conflicts that result from the positions and counter-positions of those who seek to move from unauthenticity to authenticity. As the process unfolds, those holding these positions and counter-positions will come to recognize their oversights, mistakes, and even their sins, and they will repent of them.

¹¹⁴ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 252.

Through this process conflicts will eventually be resolved and human development will be advanced.

Not only do Jon Darrow, Neville Aysgarth, and Charles Ashworth hold differing theological positions, they clash with each other on the issues of everyday church life as well. For example, when Darrow takes charge of the local parish in Starrington Magna, Aysgarth, as Archdeacon, is sent to admonish him about “deviating from the rubric” and the necessity of “soft-peddalling the Anglo-Catholic touches.” After their acrimonious encounter, Darrow thinks: “I wished then that I had been less inflamed with angry pride, but the damage had been done and I knew we had wound up enemies again.”¹¹⁵ A difference of opinion also arises between Ashworth and Aysgarth over the commissioning of a modern sculpture by Harriet March that will be displayed on the Starbridge Cathedral grounds and that is considered by some other characters in the novel to be an obscene display. Aysgarth tells Venetia Flaxton about the conflict between the bishop and himself in a letter that is laden with pugilistic and legally confrontational terminology.¹¹⁶ Even on the level of everyday church life, then, positions and counter-positions are seen in the novels to arise within the Church of England in its ongoing process of moving from human unauthenticity to authenticity.

Furthermore, Lonergan envisions the interplay of positions and counter-positions among theologians as a means of promoting conversion. Thus he states:

Inasmuch as they pronounce one view a position and its opposite a counter-position and then go on to develop the positions and reverse the counter-positions, they are providing one another with the evidence for a judgment on their personal achievement of self-transcendence. They reveal the selves that did the research, offered the interpretations, studied the history, passed the judgments of value.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Susan Howatch, *Glamorous Powers* 285.

¹¹⁶ Susan Howatch, *Scandalous Risks* 323-325.

¹¹⁷ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 253.

Lonergan calls this process of self-revelation a “crucial experiment” that will provide the open-minded, the serious, and the sincere with an opportunity to ask themselves fundamental questions not only about those who hold counter-positions but also about themselves. Dialectic or the holding of positions and counter positions thus will help to demonstrate the differences between positions and counter-positions in a stark way. This will promote self-scrutiny and reflection on the part of those who hold these positions and counter-positions which will eventually bring about a deeper understanding of one’s purpose and goal. Therefore, not despite the conflicts that arise among the three main characters in the Starbridge series but because of them, the conversion of each character progresses.

5.6. Implications of This Study for Modern Christians

Allusion was made early in this dissertation to the fact that all literature in some way represents reality and that this reality reflects the worldview of the author.¹¹⁸ It was also stated that Susan Howatch wrote the Starbridge novels as a result of her own religious conversion; although she did not intend to write Christian novels, still “the great Christian themes of sin, repentance, forgiveness, redemption, resurrection, and renewal... seeped” into her work.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, in her three main characters in the Starbridge series--Jon Darrow, Neville Aysgarth, and Charles Ashworth--we have noted the delineation of three theological stances in the Church of England during the historical time of the novels. These encompass Anglo-Catholic Mysticism, Liberal Modernist

¹¹⁸ See the Introduction, pages xii-xiii for a discussion of these premises.

¹¹⁹ Susan Howatch, “Do Christian Novels Exist?” Scandalous Truths: Essays by and about Susan Howatch 259.

Protestantism, and Orthodox Conservatism with a Middle Way churchmanship respectively. In addition, it was proposed that Bernard Lonergan's theory of conversion presented in his Method in Theology might be applied to these three characters' lives as they are depicted in the novels so that the reader might understand this theory in practice, and in understanding it, might also experience it. This in no way intends to deny either the operation of grace or the necessity of a person's response in the on-going process which Lonergan envisions conversion to be.

Therefore, several implications emerge from this study. First, the process which Lonergan calls intellectual conversion, moral conversion, and religious conversion happens within the everyday occurrences of the characters' lives, in the choices they make, in the relationships they form, and in the situations which fate thrusts upon them. When each main character in the novels takes the time, usually in the presence of a spiritual director, to analyze all of these circumstances and to assess the impact he has had on them and they on him, then he gains a deeper understanding of himself and the reality he inhabits (intellectual conversion), he moves from acquiring mere self-satisfaction to a more profound value, (moral conversion), and he becomes the embodiment of that love which initiated his conversion process in the first place, a love that is "without conditions, qualifications, reservations"¹²⁰ (religious conversion). That the process of conversion as Lonergan describes it does take place in the normal everyday situations of life provides a source of hope for modern Christians on their own journeys toward self-transcendence.

A second implication that can be garnered from this study lies in the fact that sins,

¹²⁰Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology 242.

or “breakdowns,” as Lonergan calls them, can and do occur within the normal process of conversion. It has been shown earlier in this chapter that sin, in fact, is a part of the dialectical process of religious development, as Lonergan says,¹²¹ that it precedes repentance in the life of the reflective Christian, and that it leads to forgiveness, redemption, resurrection and renewal. Each one of the main characters in the Starbridge novels sins repeatedly, and yet his process of conversion is not stopped entirely, but only inhibited for a time, until he repents and begins to redeem the sinful situation caused by his own decisions and actions. The fact that sin is a hindrance but not a deterrent to conversion is also a source of hope for modern Christians who find themselves also subject to temptations and trials.

Lastly, it can be inferred from this study that the theological stance of the Christian involved in the process of conversion does not change the outcome of the process. Each main character in the Starbridge novels perceived God in a different way and in accordance with his own theological stance, and yet each arrived at times when he felt in union with God in love. This sense of union with the Almighty might have been ephemeral and fleeting, but it was real in the mind of each character when it occurred. This is also a source of hope for modern Christians who themselves are seeking the fulfillment of the deepest desires of their hearts, or in other words, union with God.

If this application of Bernard Lonergan’s theory of conversion to the three main characters in Susan Howatch’s novels of the Starbridge series aids and encourages modern Christians in some small way on their own journeys of self-transcendence, then the earnest intent of its author will have been realized.

¹²¹ Ibid. 118.

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APPENDIX 1

The Novels of the Starbridge Series	Date of Publication	Time Period Within the Novels	Main Character or Point of View
<u>Glittering Images</u>	1987	1937	Charles Ashworth
<u>Glamorous Powers</u>	1988	1940 to mid 1940s	Jonathan Darrow
<u>Ultimate Prizes</u>	1989	1942 to 1946	Neville Stephen Aysgarth
<u>Scandalous Risks</u>	1990	1988, Flashback to 1963	Neville Aysgarth from Venetia Flaxton's point of view
<u>Mystical Paths</u>	1992	1988, Flashback to 1968	Jonathan Darrow from Nicholas Darrow's point of view
<u>Absolute Truths</u>	1994	1975, Flashback to 1965	Charles Ashworth